

eartrip

Issue 1 - March 2008

"a journey for your ears"

Mike/ Kate
Westbrook

Cecil Taylor

William
Parker

Paul
Rutherford

Reviews

Articles

Criticism



**Jazz. Improv.
Other.**



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EDITORIAL

Hello. Well, here it is: the first issue of this new magazine. It's turned out to be quite substantial in length, partly because of the lengthy reviews section (which covers the whole of 2007) – I can't promise that that will be kept up. *eartrip* does not claim to be any thing more than a mere snapshot of the vast amount of exciting stuff that's going on in the worlds of jazz and improvised music today – in England, Europe, America, all over the world. It's something of a pet project, which has taken pretty much half a year to bring into being, through the making of contacts via e-mail and telephone and letters, and immersing myself as much as possible in music, exposing myself to new artists, new styles – all that makes me thrill with the shock of the new, the unexpected. 'Adventures in sound' is the tagline of another, very well-known magazine focussing on avant-garde music – if I may take that phrase and modify it slightly, perhaps what I'm going to be concentrating on is 'epiphanies in sound.'

At a time when the majority of pop music feels homogenous, has a distinct lack of experimentation or desire to push beyond the boundaries of what is expected and accepted, at a time when pop music acts as ear-candy, quickly swallowed and digested, then forgotten about, we have to ask ourselves: is this all we want from our generation's creative artists? Is this we all want - the comforting wash, the aural cocoon – or do we want something else; do we want the startling glimpse, that moment of strange clarity when, "for a second [we] get it whole," as the English poet Philip Larkin put it?

Another question arising from the consideration of these issues - is pop music really where most of the world is at? Or would most people, given the chance, given more sympathetic presentation in mainstream media, given a deeper, less vapid cultural understanding as a matter of course – would most people throw themselves beyond the accustomed, realising that there is something more to explore, a vein of rich expression that you're really not going to find on the Spice Girls Reunion Tour? Maybe they would, maybe they wouldn't, but we'll never know without trying. And of course, I don't expect this magazine to reach a very wide readership – many, probably most of those looking at these words will be people already fully convinced by, and immersed in, the sort of music I'm talking about. I realise that it's music you have to work hard at; but then, the best things in life don't come free, and, the greater the effort you put, in the greater the reward you draw out. So it is with much of the music that *eartrip* will cover.

For the most part, then, the magazine will not focus on the mainstream, the well-known, the popular – not because of elitism or snobbery, but because I genuinely feel that there is a lot of music out there which is unfairly neglected and which deserves serious coverage. Of course, there are already plenty of people writing about improvised music, often online: many blogs offer incisive commentary and downloads of rare, out-of-print music, and online magazines like *Point of Departure*, *Touching Extremes* and *Paris Transatlantic* all are well worth looking at. Of major publications, probably the best-known is *The Wire*, which started off by focussing on jazz and improvised music, but has since moved away from this initial core, so that those elements are increasingly pushed to one side in favour of other types of experimental and 'left-field' music. It's still an excellent publication, but few magazines actually cover its original territory, so I thought I'd step in. I'm not pretending that this is the greatest, most in-depth coverage you're

likely to find, but I have a real interest in this music and a desire to, hopefully, bring it to a wider audience.

So, the above is something of a ‘mission statement’, I suppose. Now onto the meat of the magazine, what’s actually going to be appearing in the following pages. It may seem somewhat strange to make the first issue of a new magazine retrospective, which, in a sense, it is, looking as it does at the highlights of last year in terms of jazz and improvised music. However, I think this is symptomatic of what *eartrip* will be trying to do: celebrate the achievements of the past, present and future, making sure that we don’t forget the past masters whose legacies mean so much, but also that we focus on prospects for the future, and the people who are making living, breathing, organic music **now**.

With this in mind comes a roundup of the previous year’s best CDs and gigs: from the complex and difficult work of composer Richard Barrett’s group fORCH to the more accessible and dreamy, almost ambient sounds of a remarkable jazz album by indie-rock band His Name is Alive (no joke – this is the real deal!) You can also find opinions and dissections of many more recent releases in what will be a regular reviews section.

As for concerts, there’s an in-depth review of the landmark first meeting between pianist Cecil Taylor and multi-instrumentalist Anthony Braxton (the first jazz gig at the newly refurbished Royal Festival Hall in London), plus thoughts on UK tours by saxophonists Charles Gayle and Sonny Simmons. Also featured is an article on Taylor’s and Braxton’s concerts in Italy, later that summer, in which Anthony Whiteford describes how these events took him on something of a personal odyssey, where he was forced to ask some difficult questions about what the music of these two avant-garde titans has meant in his life. It really is a fascinating read.

Unfortunately, 2007 also seems to have been a particularly bad one in terms of how many great musicians and composers passed away: Alice Coltrane, Andrew Hill, Leroy Jenkins, Mike Osborne, Paul Rutherford, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Donald Ayler, Joe Zawinul, Ike Turner, Art Davis, Carlos “Patato” Valdes, Frank Morgan, Oscar Peterson, and Michael Brecker. As well as making us value the greats we’ve got left all the more, such reminders of mortality may cause us to wonder who among the younger generation has the potential to carry the flame, to carry forward a legacy of innovation and full-throttle creative energy into what is still a young century. Such considerations pop up at various points in the magazine.

More specifically, this issue will feature a tribute to Paul Rutherford, perhaps the most under-appreciated of all the musicians listed above, but one of the greatest exponents of free improvisation, who earned the almost unanimous respect of his musicians and peers.

There’ll also be an interview with two of the key players in the British jazz scene for the past half-century: Mike and Kate Westbrook. Perhaps eclipsed by that other great jazz couple, John Dankworth and Cleo Laine, it could nevertheless be argued that their contribution is even more significant. Their compositions and performances have encompassed everything from classical to jazz, cabaret to opera, Ellington to the Beatles to Rossini to William Blake, literature and the visual arts, poetry, parody, pastiche and pure inspiration. Their most recent concerts have been with a new project, a small group that very much emphasises the local, and sees the mix of the old and the modern that I mentioned before. During the interview, they discussed this and a wide range of other issues: it should make interesting reading.

The Westbrook have a fairly close connection (in the spirit, if not always obviously in the mechanics of their music) with what the uncompromising avant-garde guitarist Derek Bailey termed ‘non-idiomatic free improvisation.’ What precisely this constitutes is a matter of debate, and one which is addressed in an article by a sometime punk-rocker, sometime-author, and sometime free improviser, Andy Martin. Early in 2007, the band of which he is a member, UNIT, gave a performance at the annual, London-based showcase of free improvisation, the Freedom of the City festival. He himself describes what they played as a “horrible racket,” but this negative experience prompted him to write an insightful essay in which he looks at the risks and rewards that go with this type of music. Eye-opening reading, especially if you’re coming to free improv for the first time, and even if you’re not.

It’s not just Britain that appears in the pages of this magazine: we also present an article by Dan Huppertz, focussing on New York’s thriving ‘Downtown Scene.’ More specifically, the subject is the prolific and versatile bassist, campaigner and educator William Parker.

Worldwide, the increasingly availability and improved performance of technology, particularly the internet, has created a whole new set of possibilities and potential problems for all kinds of music: jazz is no exception. I’ll be examining the case of ‘sharity’ blogs, asking questions about the legal and moral issues involved in fans making out-of-print music available on the internet.

So, as you can see, an eclectic bill, one which to some extent encompasses the diversity to be found in jazz and improvised music.

Please bear in mind that this is a fledgling publication and this first issue is essentially just a starting point, a launch-off pad for what will, if all goes well, increase in quality and depth with each new edition. Ideally, I would have liked to make it a print publication (my original plan), but I realised that it going to be just too difficult maintaining such a venture, what with the costs of printing and distribution, and the generally unfavourable climate for serious jazz and improvised music today. But hopefully, whatever the format, you’ll find much to enjoy, inspire, and challenge, inside. I wish you happy reading!

David Grundy

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FREE IMPROVISATION: THE UNFOLDING CONUNDRUM

Lessons To Be Learnt

Andy Martin is a member of the group **Unit**. Formed in 1994, its origins lie in a punk band called The Apostles, formed in 1981, which subsequently became Academy 23, before finally changing to the present name. (Guitarist/vocalist/ lyricist/occasional drummer Martin and bass guitarist Dave Fanning have been the only two constant presences in all three bands.) Since 2000, the group has been through numerous line-ups, each one recording an album musically different from the last, and making it impossible to restrict them to any one genre - they've tackled everything from post-punk, prog rock, and pop, to avant-garde, jazz and free improv. They appeared at the Freedom of the City Festival on Sunday 6th May 2007, contributing a freely improvised set as part of that day's afternoon concert, and this performance led indirectly to the writing of the article below, as Andy Martin explains:

This essay was written by me in response to a request (virtually a demand) made by 2 members of our group, namely percussionist Ngo Achoi and keyboard player Luc Tran. After our somewhat inauspicious debut at Freedom Of The City in May 2007 (I am being outrageously polite here), saxophonist Thanh Trung Nguyen actually left the group with the complaint 'I'm not playing any more of this nonsense.' This was followed by the observation 'you lot wouldn't know a decent tune if it jumped onto your kitchen table and danced a tango.' I was irritated, annoyed and upset that a highly competent 17 year old musician should respond to free improvisation in such a stridently hostile manner. It was this, combined with the horrible racket we made on May 6th, that prompted Luc and Achoi to commission this piece from me. It was originally designed purely as an 'in-house' document to be read by the other 4 remaining group members. Achoi then sent it (without my consent, as usual) to the Resonance forum and suggested I also send it to what he called 'the David Grundy Forum'! (<http://ihatemusic.noquam.com>) Now it appears here, thanks entirely to the kind invitation of Mr Grundy to include it in this magazine.



Unit, appearing at the Freedom of the City Festival, 2007. From left to right: Andy Martin (guitar), Luc Tran (keyboard), Dave Fanning (bass), Thanh Trung Nguyen (alto sax), Cheung Yiu Munn (flute).

On May 7th 2007 UNIT played what remains, to date, their worst, most inept and ineffably boring live performance ever. Nothing can atone for the excruciating tedium to which we subjected not only the audience but also ourselves in the Red Rose Club that Sunday afternoon. Nearly 300 people were witness to 5 intrepid individuals making utter fools of themselves on a stage as they plodded with ineffable confusion through a miasma of thoroughly grim sonic doodles for half an hour in the name of free improvisation. Almost all those people had never heard of UNIT previously; all of them must surely have prayed to whatever deity was available that they might never hear us again. I can only empathise with them.

During the 2 months that followed this most inauspicious start to our career in free improvisation, I formulated The Five Cardinal Rules which perhaps more advanced performers may care to subvert or challenge but which are absolutely essential for players new to this most demanding form of music making. These 'rules' were useful for me as a player and exponent of free improvisation but they were primarily formulated to assist the other group members, all of whom realised we had gone seriously wrong on that fateful day in the Red Rose Club but none of them comprehended exactly how and why we had lost the plot. Since the other 4 are far more technically proficient musicians than I, then by what right do I bestow upon myself the role of educator? A possibly dubious one: I have listened to far more examples of successful free improvisation than they have and I (at present) have a far greater love for this music than do they. That at least 3 of them wished to pursue this form and try to achieve a degree of success in it is also what prompted me to agree to their request for a short exposition on 'how to play free improvisation'.

After I had finished, I realised that these 'rules' might be useful to other musicians in our situation or even to people who have begun to take an interest in such music but who are unable to comprehend what motivates and informs its often bizarre sounds and weird sonic environments. Actually, both Eddie Prevost and Derek Bailey have already performed this task adequately over a series of 3 excellent books but, perhaps generated by some perverse desire to impose my own personality and experience on the subject, I still find it necessary to add my own contribution to the literature on the subject. I hardly need to justify this but should anyone insist then I can do so by revealing the woefully tiny amount of intelligent books written on the theory, practise and appreciation of free improvisation. Most of the more recognised practitioners are, shall we say, of an older generation and it is important to me that if people of a younger generation (Luc is 18, for example) are to be encouraged to participate then they need to understand why the aficionados of free improvisation are so ardently enthusiastic and exceptionally intense in their discussions, debates and discourses on this most fascinating of all musical adventures.

Failure to explain clearly and intelligently 'what it's all about', when combined with the rigid assertiveness of youthful confidence, can result in alienation of the worst kind. After our performance I was so angry with what I perceived to be the selfishness of 2 members of the group (who played so loudly that Luc could rarely be heard and I was drowned out completely throughout the entire performance until toward the end I threw my toys out of the pram and attacked my acoustic guitar with spoons and sticks) that I read the riot act in no uncertain terms. Trung left the group shortly afterwards, not so much because of what I said but because he could not understand how competent

musicians (U-J, Luc and Dave) could 'waste their time making a self indulgent tuneless racket that any 5 year old could play'. (He later added, on his departure from the group 'you're all arty weirdos who wouldn't know a decent tune if it jumped up on a table and did the charlston'!) This is the kind of damning indictment I would expect from a 60 year old bigot (or maybe a 16 year old punk rocker) but Trung is a highly competent and creative jazz saxophonist who has listened intensely to Charlie Parker, that in itself highly unusual for a 17 year old Vietnamese. He does himself a disservice by displaying such conservatism. *C'est la vie*.

Time for a brief digression: just because we allegedly indulged in a form of music that 'any 5 year old could play', does that automatically mean that our participation in it was invalid? Am I meant to accept that music played by 'any 5 year old' is worthless and possesses no legitimate claim to our attention? Is music invented and performed by 5 year old people less valid (on any level you choose) than that invented and performed by other age groups? Discuss.

These 'rules' are what I believe are required to ensure that UNIT make progress in their attempts to perform free improvisation in a manner liable to make a valid contribution to the genre, if indeed it can really be called a 'genre'. I am also convinced that most other inexperienced performers would find them beneficial but frequent exposure to different free improvisations played by other people and continued familiarity with the language in their own performances may result in the desire to modify these 'rules' in order to render them appropriate to their own needs. However, I doubt that even after such modifications have been made the 'rules' would be radically different to the form in which they appear below.

1) Play only when it is absolutely essential to do so. Do you need to play anything at the moment? Does what you are playing actually contribute in any meaningful manner to the music / silence you hear? Just because you can play does not automatically mean you have to play.

2) Play what the music requires. What can you hear around you? If you play now, will it unfairly dominate, drown out and obscure what the quietest instruments / voices are playing? What ever you do play (if you decide to play at all), it must be what the music needs, not what you need. There is no room for the empty gestures of egotism in genuine free improvisation.

3) Be responsible for what you play and be aware of what is happening around you. You hear a kind of music playing to which you wish to respond. Do you try to copy it in your own style or play something entirely different? Which of the two will make the most interesting or musically valid contribution to the music as a whole? This includes extraneous sounds that may intrude during quiet moments (police sirens, aeroplanes, bird song, audience coughs or, of course, the inevitable mobile phone playing Für Elise). Ignore these at your peril!

4) Learn to appreciate the value of silence. In free improvisation more than any other form of music making, silence is not only important but sometimes essential in order for the music to make aesthetic sense. All the best free improvisers not only appreciate the true value of silence but they also utilise it for the benefit of the music.

5) Do not ever be afraid to take risks. Do not ever be afraid to fail. In the absence of risks, free improvisation stagnates into cliché and formula. Free improvisation always

includes a propensity for failure. You can make mistakes but try to ensure you make the right mistakes. If you fail, strive to ensure that you fail better than you did last time. If these 2 sentences make no sense to you, then play free improvisation with a small group of performers every day for a month. After that time, I guarantee you will understand precisely what is meant by these statements.

Free improvisation is not a 'jam' (which is a disgusting rockist word). It is not a space for you to show what you can do. Virtuoso displays are a symptom of bourgeois music practise and have no place in free improvisation. Technical prowess is highly desirable but not absolutely essential, provided you have assimilated and put into practise the 5 cardinal rules. What is crucial to learn and remember is that once a free improvisation becomes a lead soloist being accompanied by a band, the music loses much of its credibility unless such a moment is actually dictated by the need of the music. In this case the 'solo' must only be of a duration sufficient to make musical sense. This applies to ordinary rock groups. It is why Emerson, Lake & Palmer are frequently tedious and boring while Egg rarely are. Both are progressive rock trios comprised of keyboards, electric bass guitar and drums with the bass guitarist doubling as a vocalist. There the similarities end. Most of the former group's music consists of incessant keyboard pyrotechnics (especially in a live concert context) with the other 2 musicians relegated (bullied) into subordinate roles. Egg never descended into such rockist mediocrity which is why their music is still vibrant and exciting 35 years later. As an aside, 2 of our youngest members discovered ELP in 2002 but became bored with them within a year yet they now have all 3 CDs by Egg and still listen to them.

Rule 3 contains an aspect generally ignored or at least not understood by most normal musicians. I prefer not to go to live classical concerts anymore, mainly due to the middle class snobs they attract (although this now applies to punk gigs, too – perhaps that always has been the case, at least in Britain) but partly because I find the amount of noise and kerfuffle generated by the audience intolerable. I detest cinemas for this same reason – being stuck in a large hall with dozens of odious people is not my idea of fun. In fact, that Freedom Of The City event is probably the only time ever when I have been in a large room filled to capacity with humanity and I have not ardently wished for a Bren gun with plenty of live ammo. Extraneous noise is an irritant at a conventional concert because such sounds interfere with the works being performed – although I suppose aeroplanes flying overhead during a performance of the Mechanical Ballet by George Antheil would add an appropriate ambience. In a free improvisation, however, the sound of a cough, a chair scraping across the floor, that Boeing 747, a police siren, electronic feedback or even that inevitable mobile phone can be utilised as an additional sound source during the performance. If a violinist looks through a window and catches sight of a dog savaging a cat in the street, he/she may be distracted and spoil that pretty Mozart sonata with the inadvertent insertion of wrong notes (which personally I'd enjoy, mainly because I detest Mozart – give me Messiaen any day). If he/she is engaged in a free improvisation, however, the incident may well inspire him/her to add something new and interesting to the musical proceedings.

One of the prime aspects of free improvisation – perhaps it is not accidental that some people refer to it as 'left field music' – in fact its most powerful and liberating

property – is that authoritarianism is anathema to it. This does not mean that ‘anything goes’. This music is never a licence for pure self expression as a free for all. Just as a platoon without an N.C.O. requires a formidable measure of self discipline in order to function, so with the freedom inherent in this music comes a critical degree of responsibility. Implicit in free improvisation is an opposition to hierarchical structures imposed by composers, arrangers and leaders who believe they have a right to govern the rest of us. This is of such profound importance that it is essential that free improvisation (like its visual counterpart, abstract expressionism) is treated with respect and taken seriously by its practitioners. Beware: I do not mean that the performers must deliberately strive to adopt an aura of profundity. If its performers are really inspired and technically able then that will happen anyway. No, I mean that it is permissible (perhaps often essential) to be able to have fun, to appreciate humorous moments yet simultaneously never trivialise or under estimate the musical process.

Ngo Achoi (our manager) once suggested – in fact he still insists – that extra-musical factors form a valid contribution to individuals and groups new to free improvisation, as a method of orientation and a means by which to ease themselves into this most difficult of forms. The group can be given a basic framework (play fast and quietly, omit that instrument after this amount of time and so on) or some other prop / crutch such as a given title, an idea, an emotion or a colour on which to hang their musical exploration. I read with interest the opinions of Eddie Prevost whose insistence that these external frames, rather than help facilitate a musical event, actually inhibit it since they interfere with the process due to their imposition on what the music actually attempts to say. In other words, the minds of musicians need to be free from all such external concerns in order to create the best possible conditions in which a free improvisation can be created. On every other day of the week, I agree emphatically with this. On the other days, I acknowledge Achoi holds a perfectly valid belief. In our experience, limiting (or even inhibiting) our creative freedom by the deliberate imposition of such external rules or frameworks has resulted in music that is, to me, just as interesting, intriguing and genuinely satisfying as the most pure, strictly abstract attempts. When there is a total absence of any aids, props or external frameworks, perhaps it is the stark beauty of a total free improvisation created under such austere conditions that raises it above the level of most other music forms. Well, if you are AMM or MEV you can achieve this. Us lesser mortals often it useful (perhaps even occasionally essential) to resort to whatever aids, props or external frameworks we can devise, like games invented to help learn a language, before we are ready to launch ourselves into that complete otherness which the very best free improvisers manage to explore so magnificently.

Is free improvisation idiomatic? A vast over-simplification would be to claim that Derek Bailey says ‘yes’ and Edwin Prevost says ‘no’. Actually it is more complex than that. Listen to a few third rate, uninspired performances and you may well agree with the assertion by Mr Bailey that free improvisation can tend to become idiomatic after a while. However, 3 days spent at the Freedom Of The City event in May 2007 has persuaded me to adopt a belief system that is more sympathetic towards (yet not completely in accord with) Mr Prevost. When Trung complains that free improvisation is ‘a racket’, I can (almost) sympathise with him. U-J asked me later why a free improvisation couldn’t be in, say, Bb Major. I had to stop for a moment to consider that.

In theory, I concluded that there is no justifiable reason I could conceive for a free improvisation not to include a passage in Bb Major (or any other key) provided the players entered into the key as a natural and logical progression from what they had been playing earlier. Players need to be careful, though: once you enter into a recognisable key, where do they go from there? To remain in the same key for a long period is to be shackled to the drudgery endured by audiences of so many bland, tediously onerous ‘jams’ by The Grateful Dead (or most other late 1960s psychedelic outfits whose capacity for hallucinogenic substances was usually inversely proportional to their musical creativity).

Is there a ‘free improvisation style’? Surely not! The phrase seems ludicrous – perhaps. However, it takes novices and people who don’t like the sound of it to venture opinions which are illuminating. Both Luc (who does not like much free improvisation although he does find it interesting and treats it with respect) and Trung (who despises it so completely that he is unable even to take it seriously) have made comments about free improvisation that its more ardent acolytes might prefer to remain unspoken. In answer to Achoi who maintained that free improvisation by its very nature can never be idiomatic (a provocative statement), Trung said ‘There’s never a steady beat or pulse and you never hear people playing in the same key. It’s always a tuneless racket.’ Luc was more introspective: ‘It’s a pity you can’t have a kind of free improv where there are recognisable melodies and harmonies and where people obviously play together in ensemble passages.’ I can well imagine how Mr Bailey and Mr Prevost would respond to these sentiments although perhaps there would be dissent in their responses.

I argue that free improvisation liberates music from the cage of static pulses and the tyranny of key systems. However, that is why it requires even more discipline and awareness – in traditional music the notes are all written down and you can play the piece without even having to think about it. This is how it is possible for a performance of what could be a wonderful, dramatic classical work to end up being tiresome and onerous, because the players have been paid to do a job and nothing more. This is particularly obvious in very popular, famous works where we can almost hear the musicians groan ‘Oh bugger this, not the frigging Jupiter Symphony yet again.’ In traditional music, the problems of musical direction are solved during the composition so all the performers need do is obey the instructions given by the notes on the staves in order to give a faithful rendition of the piece. In theory therefore any group of performers could give identically correct performances of it. In free improvisation, the problems of musical direction are solved during the actual performance. Here music itself is the master, not the composer.

The problem is that this is a kind of music that is still so ‘out there’ that it is extremely difficult to avoid cliché and formula. It is also why an album by (for example) AMM sounds as if it could have been recorded at any time between 1966 and 2006. It never sounds ‘dated’ except that we can say it is unlikely to have been made any earlier than 1966 because they hadn’t formed as a group prior to that. What about some other group of free improvisers then? Why did people only start playing free improvisation in the 1960s? Well actually people were playing free improvisation long before that but not in Britain. Here I recommend the book *Improvisation: Its Nature And Practise In Music* by Derek Bailey, published by The British Library, for details on the history of improvisation, free or otherwise. In the interest of full comprehension, if you are going to read that brief but concise tome then it is also essential to read *Minute Particulars* by

Edwin Prevost, published by Copula in 2004. While you are there, you may as well read its companion, *No Sound Is Innocent*, same author and publisher in 1995. I suspect the emperor really is wearing clothes but perhaps we can too often discern a trend that informs much of his wardrobe?

In the superbly accurate and pithy (but sadly less celebrated) speech in Riverside Church, 1967, Martin Luther King referred to the unfolding conundrum of life...at the risk of trivialising the content of his words (which in this case I would be loathe to do), therein lies a most apposite depiction of the quest for magical music that all free improvisers pursue – for is not all free improvisation an unfolding conundrum that offers a sonic equivalent of human exploration?

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Derek Bailey and Eddie Prevost, authors of the two important books on free improvisation recommended by Andy Martin.

Downtown Music: William Parker

By Daniel Huppertz

This article addresses improvised music from downtown New York – a scene that, though vital and creative, may well be geographically disappearing or at least shifting with the closure of downtown clubs and steadily increasing Manhattan rents. I have begun my music research here by focusing on a mainstay of New York’s downtown improvised music scene, William Parker. Given he has such a long and distinguished career and appears on literally hundreds of recordings, I will restrict myself to a particular timeframe, the mid-1990s to the present, which marks roughly the time Parker began making albums as a leader. Downtown music, which I’m not going to attempt to define too closely here, is above all characterized by its eclecticism and DIY attitude, though Parker’s music comes more specifically out of an African-American tradition of largely improvised music that now seems broader in scope than the word “jazz” implies.

This, and following posts on New York downtown music, are written partially as a response to recent intense listening and concert-going on my part but also partially as a result of reading what appears at this time to be the only book covering this type of music in any serious detail, Phil Freeman’s, *New York is Now: The New Wave of Free Jazz* (Brooklyn, NY: The Telegraph Company, 2001). A combination of interview material, album and concert reviews, Freeman’s book is unfortunate for a number of reasons – while he writes with great passion and enthusiasm, Freeman’s range is very narrow in scope (“jazz” only) and the music is poorly contextualized and completely depoliticized. Indeed, the written material about this type of music is almost exclusively album reviews, liner notes, interviews (many listed below in the further links) and the John Zorn-edited *Arcana* books which comprise writings by musicians. So perhaps this series might represent the beginning of further positioning of New York improvised music beyond reviews and interviews. Before I start, I want to acknowledge up front the problem of utilizing the slow technology of words in response to contemporary improvised music – there’s an inherent futility in writing about such an ephemeral and spontaneous artform – so I won’t be translating particular albums or tracks into words (besides, there are plenty of reviews around) but instead attempting to contextualize the music and suggest some ways of thinking through it.

William Parker: Introduction

A New York native, William Parker began playing bass in the New York loft scene in the early 1970s, playing with older musicians including Don Cherry, Sunny Murray, Bill Dixon, Billy Bang and Frank Lowe. His first official recording released was an album with Frank Lowe (*Black Beings*, ESP, 1973). According to various interviews, Parker studied with bassists including Richard Davis, Wilbur Ware and Jimmy Garrison during the 1970s. He was a member of the Cecil Taylor Unit from 1980 until the mid-1990s, and during the mid-1980s also played with German saxophonist Peter Brötzmann and connected with the European free improvisation scene. From 1989 Parker played with the David S. Ware Quartet, recording a series of albums for independent labels and even a couple for the major label, Columbia Jazz. The David S. Ware Quartet, one of the most vital forces in 1990s improvised music, consisted of David S. Ware on tenor sax, Matthew Shipp on piano, William Parker on bass and a series of drummers including



Marc Edwards, Whit Dickey, Susie Ibarra and Guillermo E. Brown. Though this group seems to be disbanded with their celebrated last album released recently (*Renunciation*, a live recording from the 2006 Vision Festival), they may still play together for one-off events.

Parker finally emerged as a leader, with his own various projects from the 1990s to the present. During this time, he stepped out of a sideman role to become heir to Charles Mingus' legacy of the bassist-composer-band leader. Parker's most prominent and long-standing projects since 1990 are: *Other Dimensions in Music* (active since the early 1980s, though they didn't officially record until 1988), featuring Roy Campbell Jr (trumpet), Daniel Carter (saxes), William Parker (bass), Rashid Bakr (drums); *In Order to Survive* quartet (1993-2000), featuring Rob Brown (alto sax), Cooper-Moore (piano),

William Parker (bass) and Susie Ibarra (drums); the *Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra* (active since 1995), a big band combo featuring a host of players varying from a dozen to over twenty; and the *William Parker Quartet* (active since 2000), featuring Rob Brown (alto sax), Lewis Barnes (trumpet), William Parker (bass) and Hamid Drake (drums). Although these are Parker's major projects since 1990, Parker has also lead various other groups and appeared on numerous recordings as a sideman (for a full sessionography see links below). Most notable is the variety of music he has played, from free to straight-ahead jazz to a hip hop album (*Anti-Pop Consortium vs. Matthew Shipp*, 2003), albums with DJ Spooky and even his own Curtis Mayfield tribute band.

Both Parker and David S. Ware were part of the generation of New York musicians who came of age in the 1970s "loft scene" when clubs closed (or at least closed to avant-garde music), resulting in musicians starting their own clubs in lofts, private homes or hired venues such as churches. Like Parker, Ware was also a Cecil Taylor alumni briefly in the mid-1970s. They followed the "breakthrough" generation of New York's free jazz of the 1960s, of whom Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler and Archie Shepp are the best known exponents. The 1970s "loft jazz" generation are often overlooked in jazz histories, where they are overshadowed by accolades showered upon the 60s free jazz "masters". It is important to note too, the revolutionary fervor of 60s free jazz died down somewhat in the 1970s with, on the one hand, the ascendancy of rock music and the other, the closure of many of the New York clubs and spaces, either physically, or conceptually closing to avant-garde music. Though, as LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) wrote in *Black Music*, there was a downtown loft scene even in the 1960s (see the essay "New York Loft and Coffee Shop Jazz", 1963, featuring Don Cherry, Bill Dixon, Archie Shepp, Cecil Taylor, et al). So,

rather than a completely new phenomenon, the 1970s loft jazz scene may also be seen as a continuation from the previous decade of musicians creating their own venues and developing their own audiences.

In a 2005 interview, Parker cited a series of late 1960s recordings as a key to understanding his aesthetics and musical philosophy: Albert Ayler's *Love Cry* and *Spirits Rejoice*, Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, Pharaoh Sanders' *Karma*, Charles Mingus' *Fables of Faubus* and Archie Shepp's *Things Have Got to Change*. Parker states that with these recordings, "you got basically four things—spirituality, politics, the special ideas of space and time, and the tradition of folk and world music." ("Everything is Valid", interview with William Parker by Eyal Hareuveni, *All About Jazz*, March 2005) These four then, will provide a starting point for an understanding of William Parker's music. Certainly these ideas are no means restricted to the music of Parker, and by extension might also apply to other musicians of his generation still working in improvised music out of a jazz tradition in New York. I will discuss, in turn, the four ideas Parker presents: the spiritual dimension of music, the political dimension that arose out of Black Nationalism, the reinvention of musical space and time, and finally, the influence of an increasingly eclectic range of folk music.

Spirituality

"The movement is through our souls, the subtle dance of flower petals opening. The muted trumpet blowing dust off a mountain."

William Parker, *Who Owns Music?*, Köln: Buddy's Knife Jazzedition, 2007, p.107.

The 1960s free jazz generation pushed the limits of previous generations of bebop and hard bop outside of conventional rhythmic, harmonic and melodic structures, with musicians also pushing their instruments to the limits in free-form collective improvisations. But importantly, beyond the much-reviewed formal revolution, 60s free jazz represented for many a (re)connection to spirituality. The overtly mystical quality of John Coltrane's late albums (post-*A Love Supreme*) or Albert Ayler's music (*Spiritual Unity*, etc) continued with Alice Coltrane, Pharaoh Sanders and others through the 1970s. In Amiri Baraka's first book, *Blues People* (1963), he traced a continuum from early African-American church music and slave music to modern jazz of the 1950s. In the 1960s, he updated this tradition in the essay "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" (1966). Here, Baraka he connected both the free jazz scene and the R&B scene (exemplified by James Brown) specifically with a spiritual quest: "It is expanding the consciousness of the given that they are interested in, not merely expressing what is already there, or alluded to. They are interested in the unknown. The mystical." (LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, New York: Quill, 1967, p.188) Baraka also noted the bleaching process in which much cool "white" jazz of the 1950s and 60s was formalized and cleansed of said spirituality to become more like secular European classical music.

Parker's musical journey from the 1970s to the present represents a continuation of many of the 60s free jazz ideals, including this spiritual or mystical element. Certainly the work of the David S. Ware Quartet in the 1990s can be seen as a direct descendent of 60s transcendent music. Ware's raw, powerful tenor tone typically builds from simple melodic themes, which Shipp infuses with gospel-or blues-tinged harmonies, while Parker and drummer Brown provide rhythmic pulsations below as the music swirls in waves of expansive energy. The raw energy of their early albums gives way to a more

circumspect or meditative spiritual quest in albums like *Surrendered* (2000), continuing the spirit of Pharaoh Sanders or Alice Coltrane's music from the 1970s.

More recently, in interviews, liner notes and a book of his writings about music, *Who Owns Music?*, Parker stresses the importance of transcendence. He argues that improvisers/composers (he makes no distinction) develop their own entry point into what he terms the "sound stream", "the eternal space where music lives. The muse-physicians tap into the sound stream to have music flow back through them." (Parker, *Who Owns Music?*, Köln: Buddy's Knife Jazzedition, 2007, p.78) Rather than a romantic creative genius model, Parker suggests that the musician is a conduit for sound – music flows through them (rather than originating "inside") and the musician draws from the "sound stream" in the creation of cosmic music, creating a "porthole to the tone world" (*Who Owns Music?*, p.60). By returning to the idea of the musician as "muse-physician", Parker reinstates an ancient role for the musician in society as a healer, shaman or priest, while at the same time (re)connecting recent New York downtown music to various living folk music (more on this below).

Free improvisation involves pushing music language (rhythm, melody, tempered scale, chords, etc) beyond its limits, into the realm of the unknowable, a realm that we might associate with the spiritual or with magic or the supernatural. Parker's sound stream here represents the formless, boundless, fluid qualities that are the essence of this beyond which exceeds rational knowledge or systematization. To reach such a space involves an intense experience which corrodes the individual subject, a source of ecstasy which might manifest itself as extreme joy or cries of anguish. Free improvisation is a music of incessant metamorphosis, an interaction between individuals in a space belonging to none of them (nor to the audience). In a materialistic city in which values reside solely in dollars, Parker has worked to create a musical culture that is not based on solely on sales or, as so much New York "high" culture, on snobbery and pretence, but one based on this meeting place beyond the knowable. Finally, Parker's version of free improvisation is not a "high" musical culture operating in an autonomous realm of pure aesthetics, nor a "pop" musical culture operating in the image-world exemplified by MTV, but, in its transcendent quest, it is music that connects to so many other things in the world.



Politics

“Music has always been ‘out of need things arise,’ means no one will give you a gig, so you’ll learn to rent a church or a space. You have no money to fix your bass so you’ll learn how to fix it yourself. You learn how to make things because you can’t afford to buy them. You learn how to do things because it’s survival.” (“Everything is Valid” interview with William Parker by Eyal Hareuveni, *All About Jazz*, March 2005)

New York’s loft jazz scene shared certain tactical approaches with other downtown artforms in the 1970s. On a basic level, in the absence of institutional, that is either commercial or government support for culture, a culture developed whereby artists produced, distributed and managed their own art. By creating alternative performance spaces in lofts, churches or storefronts, jazz musicians were doing what artists were also doing in New York at the time. The most famous loft space of the era was Sam Rivers’ Studio Rivbea, a space immortalized in the *Wildflowers* recordings (released in 1976 as 5 LPs, subsequently released as 3 CDs or as a single CD of highlights). In interviews, New York musicians tell the same story over and over again: the relative absence of government support for culture in the United States compared to Europe, which has two effects: a continual stream of musicians touring subsidized venues and festivals in Europe, and musicians at home having to be creative in the performance, promotion and distribution of their work.

On the positive side, the importance of the loft jazz scene lay not just as a means of taking control of the production and distribution of music, but the spaces also functioned as centers of community, bringing together musicians, artists, dancers, writers as well as an audience (in fact, the audience may have been mostly comprised of other artists). Again, the parallel development in downtown art of the 1970s resulted in site specific installations in alternative spaces such as lofts, storefronts and basements, which usually involved process-oriented, spontaneous and often collaborative artworks. For both artists and musicians, this downtown culture was an alternative to the uptown commercial culture of museums and commercial galleries for artists, and for musicians, midtown clubs and increasingly commercial jazz festivals. As well as subverting traditional musical and artistic forms, downtown culture was thus also politically engaged.

William Parker, in a 2001 interview, mentioned the impact of Elijah Muhammad’s ideals of black self-determination through economic power and self-motivation on his musical career: “You had to tell yourself that you were worth something because in the school systems you were not told you were worth anything. You really had to depend a lot on yourself and your historic figures to give you inspiration: your musicians, your writers, your poets, who at that time were heavy into Black Nationalism.” (interview with William Parker on *50 Miles of Elbowroom*, by Adam Lore, 2001) No surprise then, when Parker named one of his key quartets, “In Order to Survive”. Survival as an artist in New York, particularly an African-American jazz musician, depended on self-motivation and self-determination.

A logical outcome of this tactic is the ongoing Vision Festival. Though started by Parker’s wife, Patricia Nicholson Parker, it is a forum for many of the musicians associated with William Parker. An annual festival that began in 1996, the Vision Festival grew out of earlier festivals such as the Sound Unity festivals of the late 1980s – and the same basic principles of self-motivation and self-determination still apply.

Twelve years after its beginnings, the Vision Festival today remains fiercely independent of corporate interests or sponsorship (unlike, for example, the JVC Jazz Festival which also takes place in New York in June). Vision is unique for its inclusive aesthetic – dance, painting and photography work in tandem with music – perhaps an extension of the inclusive aesthetic of the 1970s loft scene. Unlike so many contemporary festivals, you get the distinct idea that Vision not all about making as much money as possible but that it really is about both the music and the community rather than about ticket sales, merchandise sales or overpriced food and drink. Finally, Parker and Parker's recent "[Blueprint for a Cultural Revolution](#)" (Sept 1, 2007, see the Blog section), though vague on practical details, is certainly an overtly political call for government involvement in New York's cultural life (though their line about New York as "the world's center for culture" is unfortunate). But with a recently re-elected billionaire mayor whose interests extend only as far as Wall Street and real estate development, I applaud their efforts but don't like their chances.

Musical Space and Time

"All improvisers are composers."

William Parker, *Who Owns Music?*, p.67

From his beginnings in New York's free jazz scene to working with European improvisers such as the late English guitarist Derek Bailey or regular gigs and recordings with German saxophonist Peter Brötzmann (such as with his Die Like a Dog Quartet), Parker has experience in a wide range of improvised music that has led him to develop a particular musical theory based on what he terms the "sound stream". In the sound stream, Parker argues, there is no distinction between composition and improvisation, nor between musical styles. Here, the common-sense distinction between classical music (based on composition) and jazz (based on improvisation) is lost. In his book, *Improvisation* (DaCapo Press, New York, 1993), Derek Bailey argued similarly that improvised music was widespread in various global musical traditions (Indian, Islamic, Flamenco), including European classical music – his portrait of Baroque music as inclusive of improvisation flies in the face of accepted ideals of what classical music is.

Parker has been mining the sound stream while jazz became increasingly institutionalized and conservative, exemplified by Winton Marsalis' rise to popularity in the 1980s, replaying 1950s bop, only now it was codified and palatable to an uptown (read also white, conservative) audience. Thus the label "jazz" seems to be one that many improvising musicians are a little uncomfortable with today. Not that Parker (and many others) don't compose as well as improvise. At its heart though, the concept of improvised music involves an interplay between control and flow rather than improvisation and composition – something like surfing a wave, or, in Parker's terms, surfing the sound stream.

In a version of Heraclitus' famous dictum, "you can't step in the same river twice", Parker proposes a musical theory whereby you can't play the same note twice, precisely because the context has changed each time you play (see his recent book, *Who Owns Music?* for numerous elaborations of this idea). Finally, Parker argues for the importance of the audience as an essential element in any improvised performance: "Improvisation's responsiveness to its environment puts the performance in a position to be directly influenced by the audience." (*Who Owns Music?*, p.44) This idea, coupled

with the impossibility of playing the same note twice, means that recordings must be a poor substitute for a live performance in which the musicians interact with the audience. The audience is thus not an anonymous homogenous mass (as suggested by a recording), but a changing quality that effects the equation of the live performance. Which takes us back to the points above about politics and community – at the heart of the musical experience is the live performance and interaction between musicians and audience.

Folk Music: Inventing Community

“...every music that I’ve heard has been an inspiration to me. Everything from Ellington to the Benanzuli Pygmies, call-and-response, the gospel church, rhythm and blues, blues itself, Tibetan music, music from China, music from Japan. And when I say influenced, I don’t mean ‘we’re going to strive for a Tibetan sound today’, but I mean influences inspire you to seek sound.” (“[Mayor of the Lower East Side](#)”: interview with William Parker by Brian Carpenter, Free Association, WZBC 90.3 FM, Boston College Radio, aired Jan 21, 2002)

The final aspect of Parker’s music I wanted to briefly address is “world or folk music”. Although best known as a bass player, Parker often plays a variety of unusual instruments (at least in a jazz or European classical tradition), exploring various folk music of the world. The best examples of this are the recent collaborations with drummer Hamid Drake (*Piercing the Veil*, 2001, and *Spring Snow*, 2007). On these albums, Parker plays a wide variety of musical instruments from around the world, including: the shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute), the balafon (West African marimba), the bombarde (French reed instrument) and the dumbek (Arabic drum). Drake, meanwhile, plays the tabla (an Indian drum) and the frame drum. At times they evoke the repetitions and drones of trance music – that on the one hand might be traced back in a local context to late Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Alice Coltrane or Don Cherry, but on the other, a myriad of folk music traditions that also utilize improvisation. This is in contrast to the generally condescending and patronizing Eurocentric attitude to folk music, often defined as primitive or less sophisticated than the European classical tradition (though sometimes useful for appropriating in the case of say, Bartok’s music). While the characterization of New York as a global cultural “melting pot” is one I’m highly suspicious of (see my [Elsewhere](#) post), Parker does seem to draw upon a wide array of musical traditions with conviction and respect. His most recent Vision Festival premier in June 2007, “Double Sunrise Over Neptune”, featured an eclectic instrumentation – trumpet, saxes, violins, viola, cello, oud, bass, drums, the voice of Indian singer Sangeeta Banerjee and Parker himself on a variety of reed instruments.

Perhaps the more important issue of folk music is that of communication with the “folk” – above all, folk music suggests a relationship to a community different to the aloofness of the concert hall or the commodified abstraction of popular music. In the case of Parker’s audience in New York, who exactly are the folk? While it’s difficult to pin down a particular socio-economic audience for this type of music, Parker himself reflected in an interview on the loss of the African-American audience for improvised music in New York: “People question why there’s no black audience for this music – we lost the support of the community. We drained the music out of the community. We lost contact with them... you needed a club in the community, where every night there’s a concert, 52 weeks out of the year, for 10-20 years, establish it, then you have an audience. But we took the music out of the community and it drained down to the Lower East Side.” (Interview with William Parker on 50 Miles of Elbowroom, by Adam Lore,

2001) Thus the polarization of music in New York I've been referring too above is not just along an uptown-downtown white audience distinction, but needs to be extended geographically further uptown to Harlem and the Bronx. Jazz and improvised music from the 1970s to the present has largely lost African-American communities to hip hop and pop music. Despite this, the music has formed what seems to be a loyal and eclectic downtown audience.

In my characterization of the New York downtown music scene here, I've tried to tread a line that argues that this music is neither pop music (exemplified by the commodified image-world of MTV) nor "Art" with a capital A that you might find uptown at the Lincoln Center (a fossilized European classical music and opera tradition that now includes the static "classical" version of jazz). Instead, this is music linked to a community, and to a process of living. In his book, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali offers this perspective: "... the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible ... Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise." (University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p.3) Attali suggests that noise is a source of power equivalent to the written word or the articulation of space. Capitalism seeks to channel noise into saleable commodities, at the same time filtering out noise that is not the constant repetition of the same (the classical canon, be it of European music or jazz, or MTV). While downtown music is certainly integrated into a capitalist economy, it does offer a small pocket of resistance to the wholesale commodification of music, while also opening up both musical spaces for further creative exploration and the possibility of new communities.

Photos by DJ Huppertz: William Parker at Vision Festival XII, New York, June 2007 and with Howl! at the East Village Festival, September 2007.

SELECTED INTERNET RESOURCES

1. William Parker's website (<http://www.williamparker.net>)
2. Impressively comprehensive William Parker sessionography by Rick Lopez (<http://www.bbl10k.com/PARKER.disc.html>)
3. "Everything is Valid": interview with William Parker by Eyal Hareuveni, All About Jazz, March 2005 (<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id= 16709>)
4. "Mayor of the Lower East Side": interview with William Parker by Brian Carpenter, Free Association, WZBC 90.3 FM, Boston College Radio, aired Jan 21, 2002 (<http://www.freeassociationradio.com/wparker2002.htm>)
5. Interview with William Parker on 50 Miles of Elbowroom, by Adam Lore, 2001 (<http://www.50milesfelbowroom.com/articles/wparkerinterview.html>)
6. Kyle Gann, "Breaking the Chain Letter: An Essay on Downtown Music" (1998) (<http://www.kylegann.com/downtown.html>)
7. Downtown Music Gallery: the #1 source for buying downtown music (<http://downtownmusicgallery.com/Main/index.htm>)



CECIL TAYLOR AND ANTHONY BRAXTON - - FOUR DAYS IN ITALY

By Anthony Whiteford

In August 2007 Cecil Taylor and Anthony Braxton played a series of concerts in the Italian cities of Bologna, Modena, and Reggio Emilia. Anthony Whiteford made the journey to see them play, and, in the process of doing so, went on something of a personal odyssey, in which he was led to reflect on what their music meant to him before, and means to him now.

GIG ONE

CECIL TAYLOR - BOLOGNA

(Wednesday 10th October - Foyer Rossini del Teatro Comunale di Bologna)

A number of Italian critics participated in a discussion of Taylor's music, presided over by Giordano Montecchi. The critics were: Franco Fayenz, Marcello Lorrai, Francesco Martinelli, Franco Minganti, and Giorgio Rimondi.

There is a grand piano in the room and sitting in front of it are four middle-aged men, one of whom is talking into a microphone placed on one of the tables at which they're sitting. There's a big poster board beside them saying something about Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton so I'm reasonably assured I'm in the right room. It is 5.20 and this gig was scheduled to start at five. Five hours ago I was drinking a coffee beside the leaning tower of Pisa, prior to realising I'd got the time of this gig wrong and began my frantic, anxious journey across Italy, taking in the duomo in Florence during a 30minute gap between trains and paying for a taxi from Bologna station to the Teatro Comunale for a date with Cecil Taylor, which I'm a bit vague about. I think I'm gonna get CT doing his vocal sound/poetry and dancing thing. But now I'm sitting here with the minutes slipping by and these Italian guys are passing the mic along the table and each one is delivering lengthy monologues with words like 'shaman shamanic count basie jazz' helping me to continue to believe I'm in the right room whilst becoming increasingly concerned that this event wasn't gonna feature CT at all. At one point after a proliferation

of worried glances and nods a guy in the wings left and returned with a cd deck and we got to hear Ct delivering some mumbled jumbled stream of words very badly recorded.

And then, finally, unbelievably, at 6.20 Ct walks through the door at the back of the room and shuffles past the grand piano without giving it so much as a glance and without issuing a single word of apology, he sits down and gets some odd scraps of paper out of a cardboard folder, whilst one of the academics introduces him. He then proceeds to read from one of the pieces of paper having shuffled through them looking unconfident and bewildered. The guys keep fiddling with the mic, which CT seems oblivious of and he reads, haltingly, hesitantly and very badly. He stumbles over words and abandons them halfway through, then reads them again accentuating the elongated interrupted sounds of his original misreading, as if following that old improviser's maxim, 'if you make a mistake, repeat it like you meant to do it.' He pauses halfway through sentences at seemingly random points and he's moved off mic seemingly regardless. Words were lost, then whole sentences would boom out as he came back on mic. Much of what he read seemed to be culled wholesale from the warning leaflets that are issued with anti-psychotic drugs, with whole passages describing the side effects of various drugs. And then he'd cut to passages that seemed to be culled from psychiatry text books. Even when he switched to a new piece of paper, the material remained the same.

When he'd entered the room I'd been angry at him for being so late and appearing to have no concern for us, or our lives or experiences. But I also saw this very frail, dishevelled little old man, whose hair and physical substance seemed to be wasting away. And now as he lumbered through this incoherent list of words I again feel some compassion for him and wonder if this is his attempt to 'come out' as mentally ill. I'm also feeling very attached to my adoration of CT, his music, and the way he's lived out and embodiment of what I always believed the artist should be; militant, unconcerned with public opinion, uncompromising, abrasive, aloof, concerned only with his art and fuck everything else. And I want to hold onto this veneration.

CT continues to deliver his rambling words and at one point there are one or two other themes introduced; something like, time and space or sonic soundwaves and eternity. As he speaks he picks up on one or two words like 'existence' and does word play with them. All these exercises don't seem to be thought out or worked through and as I consider my journey from Bristol at 4 am and think of how long we've been sitting here in this room I feel more and more disrespected and shat upon. He's so clearly putting nothing into this presentation. At one point one of the Italian guys asks him a very long and involved question about CT's music, sound and shamanism, which CT basically ignores telling us instead all his old stories; how 'mother' made him read Schopenhauer and practise piano six days a week. 'On Sundays I was free to do as I wished.' He talks about his father too and then tells a lot of stories about hearing various artists such as Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Lena Horne and Art Blakey. He often remarks that the men were 'not nice to know at all' and seems to find this detrimental to their character. At one point he talks about hearing Billie Holiday for the first time and how it changed his life, how he couldn't believe the beauty he was witnessing. And tears come to my eyes as think 'yeah that happened to me, when I heard your goddam music. You saved me. You let me know there was someone on this planet who seemed to have stuff inside him akin

to what I was feeling inside me and you showed me it can be transformed into the most astonishing beauty. And I don't understand what you and I are doing here in this room now, cos this is not it !'

And I feel this great sadness as I fear that CT is slipping away into dementia or something, or I fear that my story of CT is my own fiction. And I think 'CT means the world to you, but he doesn't give a shit about you or your love for him.'

The stories he's telling go on and on. They're not great stories, they're old and I've heard them before, and he's not the greatest of story tellers. I keep looking at the piano and thinking it's mad that he's sitting here doing this, whilst the piano is sitting there idle.

Anyway he keeps going for about an hour and a quarter so it's now 7.30 and gone. Excuse me Mr Taylor but has it occurred to you we've now been in this room for 2 and a half hours? He finally rounds it all off with a story about how he used to be so angry and wasted his life thinking he didn't need anyone, but he's recently learned that to love and to be loved is vital and he's sorry it's taken him this long to realise. And I'm touched. I feel glad and I feel sad for him, but I feel no love or connection between CT and us in the room and I feel scared that something I've held onto as precious for so long is being lost here.

Finally we escape, it ends, with some kind of further shuffling about and I've now gotta find my way to the hostel on the edge of town. I clutch my bags tight through the streets full of drinking beggars with their dogs. I finally find a bus stop that I think might get me to the hostel and I spot 2 Japanese tourists looking dangerously naïve, brandishing, cameras, and baggage and waving their mobile phones about whilst 3 or 4 street urchins in hoodies move in on them. I stride between the hoodies and the tourists. I'm taller than any of them and as the tourists finally see the threat closing in on them and start to put away their mobile phones and walk down the street fast, I stay alongside them, making slightly insane throat sounds till the chancers looking ever more concernedly at me, slip away across the busy road. Goddammit, here I am in the evil city for day one of the Cecil Taylor four day gig. All I gotta go do now is find the friggin' hostel and sleep and get my head back together.

GIG TWO

CECIL TAYLOR/TONY OXLEY DUO – MODENA

(Thursday 11th October - Teatro Comunale di Modena)

I didn't make extensive notes at the time so this is an impressionistic picture drawn from memory. Of all four gigs in the series this was the most straightforward and 'successful.' I did write some notes the following day which I'll include here-

Ct and Oxley man what an odd couple they are. I think maybe they're re too good together. Oxley is such a total complement, he maybe, takes the edge off the music. Mind you what's lost in the lack of tension is replaced by the total sound mesh of the music. I think that Oxley sits in behind ct almost exclusively and it would be easy to assume that he's providing the backing rhythm whilst ct sets about his usual rushing cascading thumping music, but I think Oxley is actually providing the most perfect perpetual

influence on ct in that it's very alive polythythmic energetic driving drumming. It's a bed of living intricate rythms and sounds and it's totally alert to any twists and turns ct may make.

The gig begins with ct doing his word thing again. A lot of it's the same words as yesterday. But tonight, he sticks exclusively to the poems and with the added theatrical dimension of him standing and moving about stage I find myself less preoccupied with the quality of the material. And I'm comforted [and frustrated] by the sight of the piano and drums all set up and ready to go [hopefully]. I also continue to hope that this section wont go on too long as every minute away from the piano seems such a waste of time. On top of this there's the added dread that the vocal slot might be followed by a goddam pro-forma Oxley drum solo, but mercifully this don't happen. Ct stays on stage following his solo slot and Oxley comes wandering out and sits at his kit, whilst ct gets onto the piano at last. And ct's got his bits of paper with some kind of music or summat written on them, which seems to be the norm these days. I'm not sure he used to ever use any kind of pre-planned written notes. He's also taken to opening with some very light and almost pretty melodic statements, that are even maybe tender? And this is where he starts tonight. And Oxley's in there with him tapping away as is his wont. This is where they fit very well, these two, their improvisations are very much chips from the block of their body of work. You can't often say, ah yes this one was like that and that one was like this. And tonight in modena, in this exceedingly lavish opera house full of red velvet and gold leaf, they soon get warmed up and tuck into that thing they do.

It stays rather light and almost pretty. Ct doesn't go straight into his heavy heavy clusters and runs; he's doing all these delicate little figures with lovely little twists at the end. Oxley for his part, don't respond to ct in a pointillist moment by moment way, he does his thing, but he is right in there with ct and he'll turn on a sixpence if ct moves in certain directions. They're weaving this very tight knit mesh of sound. And ct seems happy and relaxed, like he has every faith that Oxley is gonna stay with him, but confident too that Oxley is behind him, or at the most alongside him and never ahead of him driving him on.

Yet there's something about the relentless ever-shifting polyrhythmic layers that Oxley provides that is driving, or at least cushioning ct all along the way. I imagine there's some kind of chemistry at play here, cos I don't think Oxley is gonna be phased by ct, but on the other hand I think Oxley isn't into the world of egos and those kind of clashes, so he doesn't clash with ct but he also doesn't annoy him by being intimidated either. Oxley often takes long admiring looks at ct and smiles broadly and warmly. I don't spot ct respond visually to any of this, but he's roaming around the piano, full of a certain energy and drive that is about dynamics within the music and not about anger or other emotions.

At some point during the gig ct gets into that crashing rumbling thumping thing he does and this seems to be prompted by the ongoing build up of musical energy Oxley is creating with him. But, but but.....something is missing from ct's music now, for me anyway. And I find my attention drifting in a way that I'd not expect with ct's music. Even on disc, I find myself riveted to ct's music mostly, specially [and I'm loathe to say

this] the old stuff that seems so emotionally charged and intense. So here in the opera house, I'm not on the edge of my seat by any means, and my attention even wanders, so there are whole periods of time when I'm elsewhere in my mind and then I remind myself to come back and listen.

They play for about 45mins I think. And then ct stands up abruptly, as he does, and walks off, with Oxley, following on his heels resembling somewhat an obedient hound dog.

The audience explodes, in a way the music didn't, and they keep on clapping and whistling determined to wring an encore out of the musicians, all of us I guess, very keen to get more than this before we leave. I'm thinking we may as well keep trying though I know we're totally dependent on ct's mood and all the roaring from the stalls won't sway this. Then a guy wanders on stage and says we can keep on clapping if we like, but this is actually only the interval.

It occurs to me somewhere within the four days of ct gigs that, whereas ct's music has become terribly predictable for many years now, [for most of his career, some would say] what is utterly variable is the presentation. Tonight he's gonna do 2 sets, and deliver a standard show it seems. Or maybe he'll come back on and torment us with some more poetry, or maybe he'll just send Oxley on to do a solo, or maybe they'll just do 5 minutes of some nice ellingtonian tinkling [more and more of which I seem to be hearing in the music these days??] and ct will get up and leave.

They take a long interval, at least half an hour I think and come back and play a full on forty five minutes or so of a second set in the same mode as the first. There are some natural stops and starts where ct seems to take up a new refrain or theme, having rustled through the bits of paper on the piano music stand and then they cook away with their individual rhythmic tapestry. Again my attention wanders some times. Oxley uses his electronic device which echoes back what they're doing on some kind of delay. And again he looks so happy with ct and with the music. I think what's happened here, is that ct has become a European improviser. I think this began in the late eighties when he found all these European improvisers who could meet him musically and even technically, they could hear him and they could follow him. But they didn't necessarily share his story, his social raison d'être, or his anger, but they utterly understood the music and it presented no problem to them whatsoever. And I imagine this must have been so so nice for ct to come home to. But now I wonder, if he's lost summat by stepping out of the American jazz fold so utterly. But on the other hand, for chrissakes, he's found some peace here I guess, and a man can't stay in pain all his life, least of all to satisfy the spectators of the atrocity exhibition [one of whom might be if I'm not careful.]

I wander the pleasant streets of modena back to my hostel and I reflect back on the pleasantly sophisticated music I've been with this evening. Modena is a quiet town so 11 at night feels late and there's a pleasant and safe, sleepy feel to the streets, which I'm very much enjoying after the brutal urban landscape of bologna. When I return to the hostel a very drunk young guy comes out of the lift and says something to me in a language I don't understand. I tell him I don't comprehend. And he looks at me and

thinks, 'no, of course you don't, it's obvious just looking at you.' And he seems to accept this situation as a natural reality. I think to myself 'jeez don't let that be my room mate.' And it turns out he is my room mate. He's up all night, with his light on and he comes and goes. At some point he's rapping with our other room mate. I cannot imagine what he's finding out there in modena to fuel his excursions out. I'm glad of my earplugs and my eye mask. At about seven I pull my mask up and see his light's still on and he's not in bed. This morning I'm not getting up till 10 and then I've got nowhere to be and nothing to do all day; an idea that fills me with bliss. We are all getting older.

GIG THREE

CECIL TAYLOR AND ANTHONY BRAXTON - BOLOGNA

Joined by [unadvertised] WILLIAM PARKER

(Friday 12th October - Teatro Comunale di Bologna)

The first thing I spot, like a blot on the landscape, is william parker's bass on stage, between the piano and the saxophone mics. Cecil Taylor, presumably due to some psychological complexity around playing with Braxton has changed the line up. So I'm not gonna get the duo I've been dreaming about for months.

I take my seat, right at the very front looking way up to the spot where Braxton and Cecil Taylor are gonna be.

I can't remember how the gig starts. There must have been a short poetry/word slot by ct. I think he announced they'd each be doing a solo. William Parker did his somewhat undistinguished bass solo routine and then Braxton came on with his alto and took his position at the mic ct had used earlier. Braxton played a fairly distinct, melodic phrase then embroidered and deconstructed it. At some point he started singing a melody that went up quite high whilst also playing the alto, creating a very intense mood like he was trying to squeeze as much of himself down the horn as possible. This solo piece seemed to stop and start and I possibly had 3 distinctive parts to it. There was a mixture of this high intensity with vocals down the horn, mixed with an oddly melodic, quite jazzy thing down fairly low on the horn. And then he was gone.

Ct did a solo, I cant remember it nor where it was placed in this first set.

After the interval they return and ct's over with ab talking into ab's ear. It looks to me like ct is issuing fairly explicit instructions whilst ab appears keen to show that he's paying attention. My fantasy is that ab just wants ct to be gone back to his piano so they can get away from this verbal interaction and get into the music.

When they finally start up the music it feels like ct is leading. It's certainly his music as opposed to Braxton's and I recall overhearing some associates of Oxley sitting behind me at the london gig, joking about how ct had said he would not be playing any of braxton's goddam charts. And here in bologna, the same as in london, it sound like ct is refusing to meet ab in the music. Whenever ab starts to warm up and take off ct cools right off, or even abruptly stops. If ab picks up on something ct is doing, ct changes it. Ct pointedly smiles and nods at certain things parker plays, as if he's one of those horrid schoolteachers who lets the kids know how shit they are by praising the chosen pet student whilst they look on excluded.



Braxton, meanwhile seem at all comfortable, he's doing his jazzy sort of thing like on his 'standards' work. He's following ct and I imagine he's trying to be good to placate ct. And although ct looks so delighted with parker's playing, I'm deeply unmoved. He seems to be doing what he does. I can imagine him doing this stuff in his sleep.

I'm feeling frustrated. I've been checking ab's ghost trance music of late and what I'm getting here feels.....what....unsurprising? stale? dated? All of these I guess, but the main problem for me is I feel I'm not getting goddam Braxton. And then ab reaches down for his sopranino and there's a glorious moment [a very short moment] where ab brings something startling to the music, doing his staccato sharp blaps of sound, cutting into the music. But after the very first distinctive squawk ct stands up, collects his sheet music and leaves the stage. Braxton has his eyes closed and for a bit longer he plays with Parker still with these brilliant chirps of sound, until Parker notices that ct has gone and he promptly puts down his bass and walks off, leaving ab up there with his eyes closed, oblivious to the fact that his fellow musicians have abandoned him in mid flight, poised with his sopranino mouthpiece in his mouth, alone on stage with in front of thousands of dumbstruck people. Eventually he opens his eyes and registers, with a look of shock firing across his face, that the others are gone, shrugs his shoulders, puts his horn down and walks off stage.

The audience remain still and silent for a while and then we erupt into slow handclaps, whistles and jeering and we keep this up for a long while. Some people even take to banging on the woodwork at the front of the stage or up in the circles and we keep going for a good ten minutes. The lights go up and uniformed guards [police?] line the inside of the stalls looking menacing. For a while I hold onto some hope that Braxton will re-emerge and treat us to some more solo music, which I'm thinking, I'd find preferable to the trio. Or maybe Parker and Braxton will play. I entertain no notion of ct returning. I also start to feel sick of ct's behaviour and that I really don't wanna see him again. Gradually, though I continue to protest, I become more and more resigned to the belief that no one's coming back; that's it, after all this journeying, the second and last Bologna gig is over with. And I'm sickeningly aware that tomorrow's quartet gig maybe won't happen. Which will mean I've come all this way for a couple of 15 minute solos this evening, an excruciating audience with ct, raconteur and an evening of Taylor and Oxley

duo, the only gig that simply started on time, delivered 2 sets and closed according to plan.

Out in the foyer I find one of the promoters dosing himself liberally with rescue remedy. I ask if tomorrow's gig will go ahead. 'Yes the gig will go ahead, believe me.' I express my doubt, but he insists, 'It will go ahead, it has to.' He says 'today has been very difficult. Every 2 hours he changes and says "no, the gig will not go ahead." Then 2 hours later "it will go ahead." All day like this right up to the start of concert.' We talk a bit more. I say I'm worried about ct, he seems unwell, unbalanced. The guy seems to concur, he says 'he's always been difficult but now he is impossible.'

I leave feeling angry and sad and bewildered. I'm angry at the effort I've expended getting to this gig only to be short-changed. I'm sad at the obvious turmoil that ct seems to be living within. And I'm bewildered because a lifetime of admiration for a man whose music has saved my life and my sanity is now wilting, bringing with it fundamental conflicts about what I demand of 'the artist' seeming to conflict with my demand for 'customer satisfaction.'

And now I gotta get past all the drunks and beggars with their vicious looking dogs and get on the bus to the horrible hostel on the edge of town.

GIG FOUR

CECIL TAYLOR 'HISTORICAL QUARTET' – REGGIO EMILIA

(Saturday 13th October - Reggio Emilia, Italy)

(i) I have listened once more to the recording of the quartet gig. I was not completely captivated by it. I have to say I've reached the conclusion that this coupling of ct and ab doesn't work. Ct is too set in his *modus operandi* to allow ab's music to influence what he does and ab is too willing to mould himself to the demands of ct and therefore doesn't bring the element of himself that might have made the project interesting. The sparse and angular interjections that ab brought to the music very briefly during the trio gig were not present at all in this quartet gig. My guess is that ct insisted that ab take solos or sit out, which would describe what he did during the quartet gig.

ok

The Quartet. Live in Reggio Emilia.

(ii) I've listened to it yet again. I don't know how to approach this music anymore. Too much has gone on between me and ct this week. I realise now, as well, that I've become very immersed in ab's ghost trance music and I find it more satisfying than most other music there is. So I'm dissatisfied with this music cos I wanted ab to meld some of his gtm sensibilities into the mix. But he can't cos if he tries ct will walk off. So I've tried to approach it like it's a ct quartet with ab on saxophone, which is what it is actually. And ab doesn't play the best saxophone I've ever heard play with ct, cos clearly ct ain't letting him do his thing.

So he plays like a jazz saxophonist, he puts in a handful of blistering solos over a period of 40 minutes of full on free jazz in ct style. But it don't work cos ab's so cramped and it looks like it's impossible for ab to get too close to ct musically cos every time he gets close to harmonising with ct, then ct moves off away from him. And also the ct parker oxley unit is very tight. Oxley and Parker are sticking very tight to ct throughout, like those kids in the playground who stick close to the bully so they don't get mashed. And ab sounds out on a limb, trying too hard.

Now it occurs to me, how come this gig don't work, cos with ct's music the unit's supposed to be tight and meshed. Even though the horn players generally take what can pretty much be described as solos ct and the drums or bass are always in there tightly meshed. But here in Reggio there is no mesh. So the most satisfying and successful stretches are those brief moments when it's trio playing and ab is laying out, which by the end of the gig he's doing a lot of. For about the last ten minutes of the main 33 minute set he stands there with his eyes shut and his saxophone clutched tight to his chest, like he so often does in his music and to me he always looks like he's following the music so intently and he's got his antennae out for what's coming next from his horn, but at Reggio Opera House, he keeps holding the horn close to his chest and his eyes tight closed and I'm imagining he's waiting for this all to be over and done with.

When the quartet come back on for an encore he does a little melodic, lyrical solo and then, again stands, silent holding onto his saxophone till it ends.

There we are, that's all I can do. Ct played like ct always does, as did Parker, whose bass playing at these kind of free jazz gigs seems pedestrian to me these days, if not perfunctory and bored. Oxley did his thing too. He was loud I thought and he stuck close to ct and provided some of the most dynamic aspects of the music with his constant clanging and banging.

That's all I can say about this now. I've not listened to any ct music since I got home. I'm afraid of what I'll feel if I do. Last year I went out and bought up loads of old ct stuff, that I'd lost along the years and I thrilled to it all over again, and thought to myself how lucky those of my generation were to have lived through times such as the AACM and One Too Many Salty Swift and Ornette Coleman and harmolodics and all that last half of the 20th century heroic journey stuff. And now I guess I gotta move on and for that I have Anthony Braxton's music, still relevant, still moving and thrilling us all and distilled into music that exists as sound and is relevant and powerful as sound, even though the social moment/movement that fed us through 68/69 and into the 70s is no longer with us as it was, and seems to exist not at all in the music. There is still Braxton continuing his heroic journey, so maybe it's worth sticking around.

I don't guess he'll be playing with Cecil Taylor again in a while. And I don't know what me and Cecil are gonna do from here on in either. I wonder if he isn't lost. Or maybe it's just that I've just lost him?



(iii) Today I re-listened to the first half of this concert again; ct and oxley in duet, ct doing his poetry/word thing again, made more tolerable by having the rhythmic backing and accenting of oxley's drumming, but still badly delivered and the same material as the last 2 gigs. This if followed by William Parker walking onto stage playing shakuhachai followed by a de rigeur bass solo that I cannot describe in any detail.

Then on comes braxton. He plays very sweet sopranino, then breaks off to whistle and hum the melody. He also recites letters and numbers in the same rhythm/melody then breaks into a very high and shrill melody played with such intensity that it keeps

threatening to split on him. At times the playing is highly melodic and emotive, reminds me of Joseph Jarman way back when he did his lovely old solo stuff. Maybe the experience of playing with ct has caused ab to return in his mind to those halcyon days of comradeship, unity and solidarity that he shared with the aacm. Then he breaks off and sings numbers in a soft voice. He follows this back on sopranino with some very fast high flighty playing with lots of accompanying growling, stops for some more humming then picks up the alto and begins popping the pads before returning to the high screealing sounds accompanied by growls. Then he goes down to the lower register and plays a melody reminiscent of his Bologna solo yesterday. He finishes with growling and fluttering half-formed rhythmic statements and leaves the stage.

Cecil Taylor takes a solo, which is extremely beautiful and slow paced, delicate and sweet. I take this to be a retort to Braxton's energetic and impassioned solo. And here I am again, back with ct remembering the immense elegiac beauty of the man's music. He holds us captivated, he weaves a web of filigree piano, taking simple motifs and stretching them out, perfectly executing his tender and minute runs. And he fills 15 minutes with this concentrated beauty and I remember what it is between ct and me. The outraged anger is gone from the music, though the man himself is still prickly as hell obviously. And there's still beauty here. A unique voice still singing.



BEWARE OF THE BLOGS!

By David Grundy

For the first issue of this magazine, I thought I'd address a topical issue that's made something of a stir in the jazz world over recent years, although it seems to have gone largely unreported in the mainstream press (except as part of general discussions along the lines of 'downloading is killing/not killing music' (take your pick)). The subject is jazz 'sharity' blogs – websites which post information about, and digital downloads of, rare and out-of-print jazz albums.

These blogs are run by fans from different countries, races and backgrounds, often under pseudonyms (which cynics would say was a way of ensuring that they can't be tracked down and sued by the record companies), and are often named after classic records (such as Cecil Taylor's 'It is In the Brewing Luminous', Terry Riley's 'A Rainbow in Curved Air', and Frank Wright's 'Church Number Nine' – the latter giving its name to one of the most comprehensive of the 'sharities', which sadly shut down a few months ago). There's been some quite fierce criticism – and I'd be the first to admit that sharing music for free over the internet is a dodgy area. But this is a slightly different case, and I'll explain why, at the same time as outlining my own views.

If you ask me, the growth of the 'sharities' is one of the best things that's happened to the music in the past few years. Today's cultural climate is one which seems more hostile than ever to this sort of creative art: witness the recent closure of the Red Rose in London (although there is the occasional exception, such as William Parker's Vision Festival). Consequently, it seems more and more likely that jazz and improvised music will have to survive through the underground – through word-of-mouth and through a small coterie of dedicated fans. The internet, with the unlimited possibilities it provides for bringing together people from all over the world, who would otherwise never come into contact, provides a perfect channel for this to happen, and for the creation of a network dedicated to hearing these records and giving them a position of some sort of recognition and appreciation.

While it will obviously differ in individual cases, I suspect that more artists than not will be grateful for the exposure – after all, a lot of these records are unlikely to get re-releases in the foreseeable future, and if someone gets turned onto a particular performer by hearing one of their old albums as a blog download, they may be tempted to go and check them out performing live, or buy their currently available albums, or to tell their friends and get them to do the same.

I'm going to quote at length from a message posted on the freejazz.org discussion group, because I feel that it encapsulates some of the problems and frustrations resulting from the (un)availability of much important jazz music on CD – in this particular case, the work of saxophonist Marion Brown:

"I am naturally somewhat dismayed at the unavailability of the Sweet Earth Flying, Afternoon for a Georgia Faun, and Geechee Recollections CDs. I know that free [jazz] music lore is littered with romanticism of out of print gems, but from what I gather, this music is not some obscure document...many people seem to feel that it's Mr. Brown's greatest work. Plus, the albums were released on Impulse and ECM...not exactly fly-by-night indies who'd be forgiven for not keeping the music in print. If you do a

Google on "sweet earth flying", you come up with 2 types of responses: ads for the His Name is Alive tribute CD (how sad is it that a TRIBUTE album is more readily available than the original works?) and about 100 different blogs wondering the same thing: why the hell can't I buy these albums, or even legal downloads? I understand the expense involved in manufacturing/re-releasing several CDs that might only sell a few hundred copies, but why not at least downloads? It seems absurd that I can't even PAY to listen to some of the greatest works of one of my favorite musicians, while the labels themselves lament the decline of music sales...What exactly are the issues that prevent out of print music from being released as downloads, or in the case of Marion Brown's CDs, being re-released entirely if there is enough demand?"

It may be true that, for some people, whether consciously or not, half the thrill is in the chase, in hunting down *objects* (rare vinyl and out-of-print CDs), to which the music itself is almost subsidiary (in a similar way, some people collect antiquarian first editions of books that they are never likely to read). But I think the popularity of the blogs shows that there are a lot more people out there for whom the music is what is important: after all, who in their right mind would rather have a crappy digital download, which they then have to burn onto CD-R themselves, than a nice big LP in one of those vintage vinyl sleeves, or just a plain old commercially-available CD release with good-quality sound? Of course, people are more likely to listen to music if it's free to do so – it's human nature to want something for nothing – yet, if this is the only way that albums like Marion Brown's are going to be heard, I can see no alternative.

The ball is really in the record companies' collective courts: if the music was available in the first place, I doubt that nearly so many blogs would have sprung up making it available for download. Someone like Ekkerhard Jost, of FMP, may complain, and request that bloggers take down download links to out-of-print FMP albums, but, if he's not releasing them himself, who benefits? Of course, there's no way the musicians are going to get any money from people downloading their out-of-print work: but they're not going to get any more money from music that's not being heard at all, and at least, if someone stumbles across an obscure album, and likes it, they may be tempted to cough up cash in order to go and see concerts by the artist, as I pointed out above. Just keeping the music under wraps, and prohibiting/condemning these blogs does not advance matters one iota.

Steve Coleman's an artist who's actually taken the initiative, and put his out-of-print albums up as MP3 downloads on the m-base website. His accompanying essay, given his reasons for doing so, is clearly heart-felt and puts in context some of the petty scrabbling for money that goes on in the music world, and, indeed, the world at large:

"Since my main goal is the communication of...ideas to the people, then why not provide this music for free, and thereby facilitate[e] the distribution of this music to the people? However, the distribution of music in this way is not in the best interest of commercial music companies, i.e. record companies, music distributors, retail stores etc.

My reasons for providing free music come from my belief that musical ideas should not be owned by anyone. I believe that ideas should be free for anyone to use (but not to necessarily sell to others or make others pay for the use of these ideas). The concept of a commons area where ideas can be used for the benefit of all but for the profit of no one may seem like an unrealizable concept in the world today. Basically greed runs the world today and it is because of this that the concept of ownership exists.

[...] I believe that ideas should be an area that is common to all people. It has been proven that real progress is made when ideas are shared and developed collectively. The ancient Egyptian society is one example of this and the development of the Internet is an example in modern times....

Although it is not practical in the present society to have a situation where all ideas and information are available for the use of all, there should be areas where ideas and information are free for the use of everyone. This is especially true of creative ideas and inspired thought.

There are some people who either cannot pay for the music or would never even listen to it in the first place if they had to pay for it. I envision a situation where maybe one third to one half of the music

that I create and make available to the public will be free of charge....There should be some ideas and concepts that are available for all to use, to contribute to the advancement of all.”

(The full essay, titled ‘Why do I give away some of my music?’, can be found at http://www.m-base.com/give_away.html)

We should be careful that this doesn’t mean we rip off the artists – there are so many horror stories about great musicians who went through periods where they were ridiculously underappreciated, and often in poverty: Sonny Simmons and Charles Gayle both lived on the streets for a number of years, Joe Harriott died a virtual pauper, and so on. Yet Coleman provides a valuable corrective to the increasingly money- and hype-driven mainstream jazz world, where tickets for a one-hour set cost over £20 and, it seems, only those with the best publicists and the best looks (it helps if you can be marketed as a “sexy young jazz singer”, especially if you’re female) can actually break through to a wider audience.

One final thing to note: it's not just out of print albums that are doing the rounds, but live performances too, which might not otherwise be released as commercial CDs, and just remain languishing in some archive, or in someone’s cellar or attic. These are often from good quality radio broadcasts, and, while you could argue that they are only for the most dedicated fans, they can sometimes be invaluable documents of stuff not captured on record - such as Pharoah Sanders’ live, where the ferocity and free jazz energy is greater than on the more famous albums he did for Impulse in the 60s and 70s.

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Following is a series of mini profiles of some of the best music blogs I’ve come across while trawling the internet, complete with details about some of the rare/unissued records that available for download from them. The albums are all out-of-print, but hopefully if they keep turning up and being downloaded some people will take note and re-issue them, as has happened with Noah Howard’s ‘The Black Ark.’

The Brewing Luminous * <http://thebrewingluminous.blogspot.com> *

Curator – Summyth/ Field - *60s, 70s and 80s Free Jazz (albums/FM broadcasts/soundboard recordings)*



Noah Howard – Space Dimension (1970)

Monster session with Frank Wright (tenor sax), Bobby Few (piano), Art Taylor & Muhammad Ali (drums), including raucous covers of ‘Viva Black’ (a.k.a. ‘Ole Negro’, from Howards’ ‘The Black Ark’) and Wright’s ‘Church Number Nine.’ Some insanely catchy hooks, as well as extremely far-out collective improvisation: frenzied, grooving, free, essential – but only ever available on a hard-to-find America LP.

Don Cherry and the Jazz Composers’ Orchestra - Relativity Suite (1973)

Carlos Ward, Frank Lowe, Dewey Redman, Leroy Jenkins, Charlie Haden, Carla Bley, Ed Blackwell, and Paul Motian are just some of the performers here, tackling Don Cherry’s compositions, which are for the most part accessible and exotic, with the leader employing all manner of flutes, percussion instruments, and vocal techniques. Highlights

include Carla Bley's tart solo feature on 'Infinite Gentleness' and the loping riff and sweet violins on the second half of 'Tantra' –incredibly joyous and life-affirming.

Pharoah Sanders - Live in Nice, July 18th 1971

Sanders and co. stretch out on 'The Creator Has a Master Plan' and his resplendent arrangement of the spiritual 'Let Us Go Into the House of the Lord.' While 'Creator' loses some of the colour and texture it had on the legendary studio version from 'Karma', the other piece presents a totally different experience to its studio counterpart; wilder and freer, it demonstrates the sort of frenzied, terrifying pyrotechnics that would all too soon become mere showpiece elements in Sanders' playing, rather than its very centre.

Julius Hemphill - Dogon A.D. (1972)– Tim Berne, who counts Hemphill as a particular hero and a major inspiration for his own playing, tried to get this reissued through his own Screwgun record label, but, due to problems with getting the rights, had to opt for upping it as a free MP3 download instead. Though that was soon taken down, it's still floating around in cyberspace, as here. Generally characterised by a relaxed feel, with emphasis and groove and even R & B elements (plus the marvellous Abdul Wadud on cello), there's still plenty of room for more experimental playing as well.

Happy as a Fat Rat in a Cheese Factory * <http://clubdub.blogspot.com/> *

Curator - Nunne/ Field – *Left-field(ish) jazz; a pretty wide range, with everything from Sonny Rollins to Wayne Shorter and free jazz.*

Marion Brown – Vista (1975)

Nothing if not underrated, Impulse's Marion Brown catalogue still remains un-issued, though 'Afternoon of a Georgia Faun' is at least available on an ECM CD. While the saxophonist and composer had achieved a glistening, twinkling, magical perfection on 'Sweet Earth Flying', whose rich electric piano and organ textures suggest what would have happened if Miles Davis' 'In a Silent Way' had been led by a free jazz player, he lets things get a little too laid-back, smooth and moody here. I mean, for heaven's sake, there's a cover of a Stevie Wonder song – but the record does also feature the gorgeous 'Bismillahi Rrahmani Rrahim', composed by Harold Budd and later to be reworked at length on his ambient/jazz/contemporary classical masterpiece 'The Pavillion of Dreams.'

Wayne Shorter – Odyssey of Isska (1969)

Along with its companion session, 'Moto Grosso Feio', this is probably the most obscure of Shorter's records: a shame, because it's vastly superior to his intricate, but rather lifeless 80s fusion work (although I know that his its supporters too). Both are mysterious, probing, sprawling, and loose (like Miles Davis' 'Bitches' Brew Sessions', which were happening around the same time), but this one is more conventional in terms of its instrumentation, and has perhaps more of a foot in traditional jazz fields, due to the presence of Gene Bertocini's guitar. It's surfaced on a CD a couple of times, once in the late 80s and once in the early 90s, but seems to have disappeared again – although Blue Note did feature one short track, 'Calm', on their indispensable 2-disc collection 'Wayne Shorter: The Classic Blue Note Recordings.'

Huppés et Hyalities * <http://huppeshyalites.blogspot.com/> *

Curator – Fredito/ **Field** – *Free and left-field jazz, 1960s-present day: mainly soundboard/FM/audience recordings, with a few out-of-print albums. Note the lovely, specially-constructed album covers in the style of Hat-Hut releases.*

Clifford Thornton/ Jazz Composer's Orchestra – The Gardens of Harlem (1975)

A great line-up including the likes of Dewey Redman, Leo Smith, and Carla Bley, plus a hefty African rhythm section tackles a hugely ambitious project, which was unfortunately never fully realized, due to financial constraints, as Eugene Chadbourne points out in his review for allmusic.com. Still, it's one of those albums that can be listened to over and over, once you get past the initial disappointment and the fact that it had the potential to be even greater. A massive conglomeration of players and styles that blends Latin, Gospel, Arabic, African, and blues aspects with jazz and free improv, it was Thornton's last major recorded statement before his death in 1983.

Nickelsdorf Konfrontationen Festival '87: three concerts



Inconstant Sol * <http://inconstantsol.blogspot.com/> *

Curators - Wallofsound, sotise, Flux'us, kinabalu, Boromir/ **Mission Statement** - *"We are diving in like leopard seals, stealthily. To us the 'inconstant sol' is a concept as exciting as penguin is to the leopard seal. What is inconstant? It's the speed of light (sol). That changes everything, somehow. A delirious joy from which flows the smorgasbord of all those things we really love free jazz, improv, marginal art, politics, food, bad photos, psycho sexual dynamics and so on ad infinitum."*

Archie Shepp – Pitchin' Can (1969)

This recording was released on the America label (which, like BYG/Actuel, never paid its artists). It consists of just 2 tracks: the lengthy large-ensemble freakout "Uhuru (Dawn of Freedom)", which has never been released on any other recording, and the shorter blues number "Pitchin' Can," which has been re-issued as part of the CD 'Black Gipsy.' Not an essential record by any stretch of the imagination, but you get three drummers- (yes, three, including the wonderfully-named Ostaine Blue Warner), searing tenor work from Shepp, and nice turns from trumpeters Clifford Thornton, Lester Bowie and Alan Shorter.

Joe Harriott – Southern Horizons (1960)

Exceedingly rare LP from a man hailed as one of the greatest British jazz performers of all time, though he was criminally under-recognized, and died a virtual pauper. He made pioneering collaborations with John Mayer, fusing jazz and Indian classical music, and developed his own free-jazz conception, separately from Ornette Coleman. He's on the verge of that free form/abstract period here, but still just about anchored in the hard bop mode on this, his first long-playing record as a leader. Check out the bongos on a couple of the tracks – very hip!

Jacques Coursil – Black Suite (1969)

Eugene Chadbourne for allmusic guide: "This amazing trumpeter led two album sessions for BYG, both highly respected projects. This might be the one to take off to the desert island...As kind of the lost voice of the trumpet in modern jazz, Coursil is not only a great discovery for the modern jazz fan, but a fine creative vintage that holds up to repeat visits over the years. His control of the difficult horn and totally original melodic thinking really makes his playing stand out among the admittedly thin ranks of avant-garde trumpet players. None of the players who have Coursil's technical mastery play with as much heart and soul...[This] is one of the best examples of just how beautiful modern jazz can be."

Elvin Jones Sextet - Live at the Lighthouse (1972)

Modern jazz with the energy and passion of free jazz, this recording was released as a double LP by Blue Note, but has never made it onto CD, except as a Japanese import. The two saxophonists are what really make it: Dave Liebman wails with controlled post-Coltranian abandon, and Steve Grossman is on the form of his career.

Jizz Relics * <http://jizzrelics.blogspot.com> *

Curator – Jizzrelics/ **Field** – Free jazz and improv, noise, electronic, experimental

Don Cherry & the Brotzmann Trio – Live in Berlin, 27th August 1971

A bootleg recording, with fairly dodgy, muffled sound, but the only chance you'll get to hear this atypical group of this atypical quartet. It's surprising how well the free form playing of the European trio sits with Cherry (who had moved into his 'world music' phase by this point): the combination of his chanting, yodeling, screaming, singing and flute playing (as well as, of course, his trumpet), with the screaming improv of Brotz and co is an oddly compelling one, and helps reveal a different side to the three European musicians that they don't so often display, more akin to the 'spiritual' free jazz of Pharoah Sanders and Leon Thomas.

Treehouse for Earth's Children * <http://treehouseforearthschildren.blogspot.com> *

Curator – Detroit JR/ **Field** – A blog with only 8 posts; nevertheless, they are a pretty eclectic bunch, from Don Cherry, Prince, Stevie Wonder, Man Machine, John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Don Cherry. It proudly proclaims that it is "illegally filesharing copyrighted material under the guise of selflessly promoting commercially available music", but don't let that put you off: this **really is** commercially unavailable music, and very good it is too.

John and Alice Coltrane – Infinity (1972)

Alice dubs strings and new rhythm section parts onto some otherwise un-issued late-60s recordings by her husband: a controversial move, but one that somehow pays off, for the most part, particularly in her repetitive, non-developmental harp interlude/solo from

‘Peace on Earth,’ which seems to exist in a state of suspended animation. Yes, I suppose you could call it ‘John Coltrane with Strings’, but these are (to borrow the title of another album), ‘strange strings’ indeed, and it’s perhaps indicative of the sort of direction he would have gone in if he’d lived. Despite all that, ‘Infinity’ has the dubious distinction of being one of the only Coltrane albums never to have been released in the U.S. on CD.

Don Cherry – Organic Music Society (c.1971)

Here’s the blog’s own description: “recorded in Sweden on a hippie / commune / organic farm. Equal parts free jazz, freak-folk, and Mmanson family jams.... Apparently released in 1971 although some sources say 1972 or later.”

The Magic of Juju * <http://magicofjuju.blogspot.com/> *

Field – Rare African and Indian ‘world’ music, as well as some 60s/70s avant-garde Rock and ‘New Thing’ albums.

New York Art Quartet – Mohawk (1965)

From the early heyday of the 60s New Thing, a fantastic group similar to The New York Contemporary Five, which Tchicai co-led with Archie Shepp. This particular line-up has Milford Graves on drums, Roswell Rudd, trombone, and Reggie Workman, a few years on from Coltrane, on bass. Tchicai, from the sleeve notes: “the important thing about our music is that it must be heard and listened to without preconceived ideas as to how jazz should sound - listen to it as MUSIC and let that be the only label!

There is so much talk about the freedom of this music, but the musician still has to abide to the rules of artistical responsibility, and they should never forget that whichever way the technique develops: the content (the feeling) must always be there (passion, energy, lyric, strength).”

Amiri Baraka – It’s Nation Time (1972)



Rather than being released through Baraka's own controversially-named 'Jihad' label, this one came out on Black Forum, a short lived Motown spoken word label active from 1970 to 1973 which also issued albums by such notable black figures as Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael and Langston Hughes. Mixing poetry, chants, and songs (all laced with anti-American sentiment), it begs Blacks to realize their African roots and strike back against the Empire. While the politics are sometimes hard to swallow, the music itself is immensely impressive, with Baraka's passionate vocal virtuosity underlain by a virtual who's who of spiritual/free-jazz musicians, including Gary Bartz, Lonnie Liston Smith, Idris Muhammad, and Reggie Workman. A particular highlight is the right-on groove of 'Who Will Survive America?'

Pharoah Sanders – Wisdom Through Music (Impulse, 1973)



Generally I tend to think Pharoah went downhill when he mellowed out (reaching a nadir with 1976's truly awful 'Pharoah'), but this is one of his better efforts - not as rambling and repetitive as some of his other work, but instead, with song titles averaging around 5 minutes, it's concise, joyous, and expressive. The 3-man percussion lineup (including Miles Davis' sidemen Badal Roy and James Mtume) doesn't hurt either! You would think Impulse would come round to re-issuing this some time: it should sit well with the 'spiritual/groove/retro-jazz' market.

Pharoah's Dance * <http://pharaohs-dance.blogspot.com> *

Cutrator - vesper/ Field - A pleasing focus on neglected artist like Billy Harper, Walt Dickerson, including plenty of the 70s Strata-East style jazz. Also features some rather swanky Lalo Schiffrin/Quincy Jones 60s soundtracks.

Rufus Harley – Recreation of the Gods (1972)

You may remember this man from his recent obituaries – the black jazz bagpiper who played in a kilt...On this date, he also plays electric soprano sax and a sermonette (whatever that is) - crazy stuff, but, once you get used to the instruments' sound, this turns out to be some nice soul jazz.

Charles Tolliver All Stars (1968)

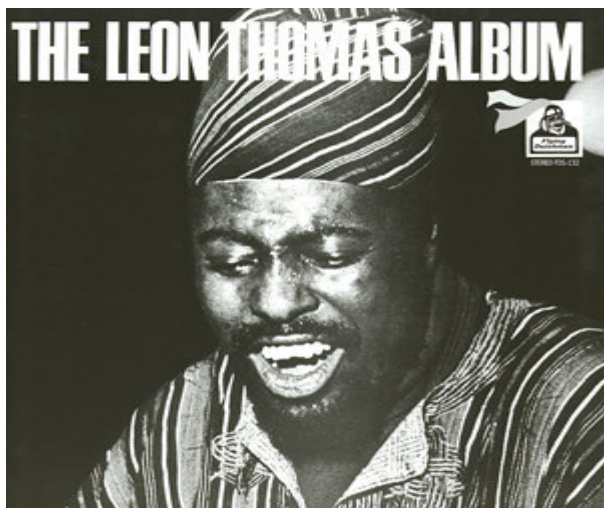
Also released as 'Paper Man' on Arista Freedom; superb music from a man whose current band (which plays some of the same tunes) has one of the top albums of the year in the reviews section. Fantastic rhythm section, and a chance to hear one of my favourite saxophonists, altoist Gary Bartz. Can't go wrong!

Alice Coltrane – Huntington Ashram Monastery (1969)/ Lord of Lords (1972)/ Illuminations (with Carlos Santana) (1974)

The earliest of these three finds Mrs Coltrane in the stripped-down setting of a trio with Ron Carter and Ben Riley, and is worth hearing, if not essential. 'Lord of Lords' is another matter, with a full string orchestra providing extremely beautiful and unusual textures. Excerpts from the Santana/Coltrane album were included on Bill Laswell's lovely 'Divine Light' album, which remixed music from Santana's 1970s spiritual/jazz period, but it's nice to get a chance to hear the full record, which is still OOP. Lush string arrangements, floaty harp, pure high-toned guitar lines – totally blessed-out and mellow.

Orgy in Rhythm * <http://orgyinrhythm.blogspot.com> *

Curator – bacoso/ **Field** - All sorts: Latin music, Japanese jazz, soul jazz, fusion, 60s Blue Note recordings (lots of great obscure Bobby Hutcherson), the occasional free jazz record...



The Leon Thomas Album (1970)

The follow to 'Spirits Known and Unknown,' this was, for some reason, never released on CD. A big-band is employed, full of jazz luminaries like Billy Harper, Roy Haynes, Billy Cobham, and James Spaulding (as well as a female backing chorus). Closest to the 'spiritual/free jazz Thomas is most famous for is a tune written by Pharoah Sanders, 'The Journey', in which more avant-garde jazz is used to evoke exotic and mysterious atmospheres.

Nothing Is * <http://ajbenjamin2beta.blogspot.com/> *

Curator – James/ **Mission Statement** – *"A music sharing blog that specialises primarily in the jazz underground."*

Dewey Redman – Coincide (Impulse, 1975)

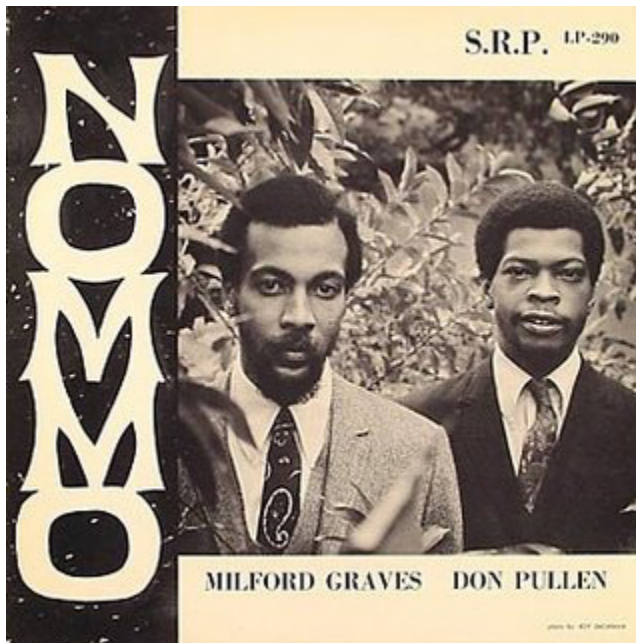
While only three of the seven pieces presented here are actually still unavailable (Impulse released four of them as bonus tracks on the CD re-issue of Redman's other album for the label, 'The Ear of the Behearer'), they are still mighty interesting. 'Meditation Submission Purification' in particular, a mysterious, beautiful track with Redman playing zither, really deserves to see the light of day.

Marion Brown – Gesprächsfetzen (1968) In Sommerhausen (1969)

Two European dates with vibes player Gunter Hampel (and, on the latter, vocalist Jeanne Lee). The second in particular is a great example of cool modernism – more 'weird', objective, playful, and satiric, than American 'Fire Music' of which Brown had been a part, but deeply serious and emotionally felt too.

Marion Brown – Creative Improvisation Ensemble (1970) Soundways (1973)

Two spare and spontaneous duet albums: the first with trumpeter Leo Smith, released on Freedom Records in 1970, the second with pianist Elliott Schwartz, recorded live in 1973.



Milford Graves/Don Pullen NOMMO (1966). From Thurston Moore's 'Top 10 from the Free Jazz Underground' list: "Milford may be one of the most important players in the Free Jazz underground. He enforces the sense of community as a primary exponent of his freely improvised music. His drumkit is home-made and he rarely performs outside of his neighborhood. When he does perform he plays his kit like no other. Wild, slapping, bashing, tribal freak-outs interplexed with silence, serenity and enlightened meditation. This LP was manufactured by the artists in 1967 and is recorded live at Yale University. The interplay between Milford and Don is remarkable and very free."



If, for any reason, you don't feel comfortable downloading full albums, the following site offers a useful alternative: Melodiradion ("jazz and other sounds – live and rare"). It offers podcasts with radio and vinyl tracks from a wide selection of free jazz artists: <http://melodiradion.podomatic.com/>.

Of course, I shouldn't neglect what is perhaps the best of all these blogs: the inestimable Destination...Out! (named after the Jackie McLean album), where the hosts put up one-three obscure tracks a week, accompanied with concise and precisely fitting descriptions, which manage to be concise, witty and even poetic. It's got some big-name fans too: pianists Ethan Iversen and Vijay Iyer, the latter of whom contributed a special MP3-mix of jazz piano tracks which had personal significance for him, and were influential in his development. I've lost count of how many wonderful artists and albums I've become acquainted, or re-acquainted with, through Dest. Out's posts. An essential site: <http://destination-out.com>.

“Let’s not have barriers where we can avoid them”: AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE & KATE WESTBROOK

Interviewers: David Grundy and Noa Corcoran-Tadd. Article (and photos) by DG.



Mike and Kate Westbrook are, and have been, two of the most significant figures in British jazz for more than forty years. He – a superb composer and arranger, and a mean pianist – and she, a painter, lyricist, and strikingly individual singer – have more than a right to challenge Cleo Laine and John Dankworth as Britain’s leading jazz couple, and their creative powers are still as strong as ever. Over the years, they’ve brought a distinctly European sensibility into their work, while remaining very aware of the music’s American roots (as evidenced by the stunning ‘On Duke’s Birthday’, recently re-issued by Hat Hut).

At its best, Mike’s Concert Band, which in the 60s and 70s contained the likes of Mike Osborne, John Surman, and Paul Rutherford, was capable of generating a boisterous, buoyant joyfulness that has rarely been equalled. But there’s also a distinctly tough, rough, gritty edge, too, seen most notably in Kate’s deep-voiced, highly dramatic vocal style, arising from her penchant for Kurt Weill-esque music theatre: her voice has qualities which most jazz singers seem to lack. Astonishingly wide-ranging in subject-matter, they’ve tackled everything from Peter Lorre to nursery rhyme, the Beatles to Rossini, European birds to European painters, and in this latest work, the wonders and dangers of the internet, and, together, seem to have found the perfect balance between tradition and innovation, high-brow and low-brow, the old and the new.

All these things are true of their latest group, the Village Band, which, back in November 2007, appeared for a performance at the intimate venue of Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. Joining Mike, who played euphonium, and either composed or arranged the music that was played, and Kate, who played tenor horn, sang, and wrote lyrics, were Gary Bayler on tenor sax, Stan Willis on alto sax, Mike Brewer on trumpet, and Sam Smith on trombone. An unusual line-up for a jazz group, and one with an interesting repertoire: they begin with 'The Waxework Show' – a suite with music by Mike, and extraordinary lyrics by Kate, which draw parallels between Victorian waxwork shows and the internet – and end with 'All that Jazz', another suite which encapsulates a good deal of jazz history, in a collection of classic pieces and standards from Jelly Roll Morton to Mingus. The band's also got an interesting history behind it, as Mike went on to tell us, in a conversation that skirted through the Westbrooks' entire career, and a good deal of jazz history too!

David Grundy: *Perhaps we could start with this project, with the Village Band: the genesis behind it, how it came about, what you're trying to do with it.*

Mike Westbrook: Well, it really did begin as a little band in the little village in South Devon, where Kate and I were living about 10 years ago. It was very much an affair with local musicians, kids, school-kids, and one or two other amateur players, with me writing simple arrangements; and, as Kate plays the tenor horn, and I play the euphonium, it was a chance for us to [play those instruments]. The idea was to try and just contribute to the community, playing music at Christmas time, or at a summer fete, or whatever it was. So I started writing arrangements which were tailored to the abilities of the people in the band, and gradually the repertoire grew and gradually we got a little bit better: the standard improved, we used to rehearse every week, and it was a thing motivated really just by the sheer pleasure of playing, and particularly playing brass instruments.

And then there a bit of a transition, because sometimes some of the local amateur players weren't available for one of these local gigs that we were asked to do from time to time, so we started to call on friends in the area, particular Stan Willis, the alto player in the Village Band, who lived locally and we knew, to come and help out. Sometimes we'd wind up doing one of these summer fetes with a band of professional-standard musicians playing these very simple arrangements - which was terrific - and sometimes a combination of the two: rank amateurs alongside very accomplished professionals.

There was a very good community feeling about it all, and it was great fun, but there was a point where we had two bands, the amateurish one and the more professional one, and I started writing some arrangements which were slightly more complicated and demanding, for the professional one. It didn't really go much further than that until we had to move from that village to where we are now (Dawlish, near Exeter). Sadly, that meant we couldn't keep the Village band going any longer, but we did have this relationship with the other guys that had become involved over the years, and so we started rehearsing every week with this line-up that you'll see tonight, who all live locally. We're in Dawlish, Sam, the trombonist, is an Exeter player, the trumpet player Mike is from Newton Abbott, Gary, the tenor player, lives in Dawlish - so they're all local, and we just met in a bar every week. I would write some arrangements and we'd practise them - again, not really with any definite plans to do anything with it,

professionally; it was really just for the pleasure of playing, partly a social thing and partly just for the joy of music.

But there was a point in our rehearsals where I was starting to do some slightly more advanced writing, and the thing suddenly sort of gelled. I suddenly realised that this was a serious musical enterprise - perhaps the experience of playing together, maybe the way my writing was developing - whatever it was, we started getting into something that did demand taking seriously, rather than just as a kind of relaxation, and so at that point Kate and I decided to write a piece specially for the band. And that was the Waxeywork Show, which we rehearsed, premiered and so on - and now we've recorded it and performed it in various places, and it's going very well - and that helped to give the band a sort of identity as well.

So we do that, which is a very original piece, with Kate's lyrics and my music, and so on, but we also, still, play some of the classic jazz pieces as well - you can see that bulging pile of music over there! We can play different kind of programmes, because there is still a kind of community element in this: the idea of music with a social function, which I think is a jazz thing, harking back to New Orleans, the Jazz funeral, the wake, and so on - music was part of all these activities - and the idea of a little band of people who can move about very easily. Because we play portable instruments, we don't have to worry about a drum-kit, or amplifiers, or anything like that - we can just go into the corner of a field and strike up if we want to, and we've done that, at a farm hog-roast sort of situation.

So there is that element of trying to get music to different places, places it wouldn't normally be heard, as well as, obviously, the more serious concert area of things. It's still very early days with the group, even though, as I say, it's not something that's just happened overnight; there was a hinterland, it's gradually built up over this period, and it's evolved organically really - it isn't like the idea of 'let's form a band and make some money' kind of business, it's been much more letting the music lead things.

DG: *Just for the pleasure of it...*

MW: Well, I think that element's still there, but of course, we have to try to make a living as well, and we're slightly upping the level these days - we're getting some slightly bigger gigs, and we're happy to do that, but we still play in local pubs in South Devon, and that sort of work's very gratifying too.

It's just the sound of acoustic music - and again, there's a tremendous brass band tradition in the jazz field, which I think this has slightly died out now. Because of the economics of the current situation, you won't often see a band with six horns in it - imagine that and then adding a rhythm section...It's totally uneconomical, so you don't actually get what I like - that rich sound of six instruments playing in harmony, and all the possibilities that brings: something that used to be part of jazz very much, but I think is less around these days - not that people don't like it, but it's just so difficult to organise, and it's so difficult to afford larger bands...

DG: *One thing about the Village Band is the way it seems to be a mixture between the British heritage - the community spirit, the brass band element - and then the fact that you're playing American tunes as well - Jelly Roll Morton, Mingus, and so on. Was there a deliberate attempt to fuse the two, or was that just the way it evolved?*

MW: Well it began, actually, almost entirely as arrangements of either Christmas carols or Trad Jazz numbers, and the occasional simple modern piece. Then, at one point,

we had a chance to do a concert in a local festival, and decided to do something that was a kind of introduction to jazz history, which we called 'All That Jazz' - it went right through from ragtime to modern, and I played piano on some numbers, and we had a whole evening of going back through that. I and everybody in the band particularly enjoy playing those classics, and I feel it's important to keep that sense of history alive. This is one way of doing that: by not having a conventional line-up, with the usual rhythm section and so on, it's slightly taking the music away from its origins, and listening to it just as music – which means that you can then put a piece of Jelly Roll Morton next to Renaissance music, and you're just listening to six instruments playing music, basically. And, you know, there's a lot in common between these different forms.

I think that the older I get, the more I feel it's so important to hang on to the work of Thelonious Monk, Mingus, Ellington. It should be kept alive, but not necessarily by trying to replicate the way it was originally done...very much as in classical music, people still play Mozart, we so we should still play Jelly Roll [Morton] or whoever.



The Village Band: (l-r) Mike Brewer, Sam Smith, Gary Bayley, Stan Willis

DG: *That brings us on to the question of classical music, and the connection you have with that genre: you've written opera, you've written the Rossini piece, and so on. Quite a few people who like classical music often seem to look down on jazz, to see it not as a serious art-form, but as something inferior – yet you're bringing it into the concert hall, bringing in more complex arrangements and so on. You once said that jazz was an important way of reconciling “high art and low culture”, and so I wondered if you could talk a bit about the relation between the two.*

MW: Well, the tradition of jazz was that it was the popular music of the time - it was dance music, it was entertainment. Take [Duke] Ellington's band: Ellington's regarded as one of the great serious composers of the twentieth century, but right till the end they were doing dances in colleges, and all this kind of thing, because he was used to

working in a showbiz world. He didn't get subsidies, the arts council wasn't paying pay him – he just had to earn money by playing and recording, by selling records in the commercial world. At the same time, though, you also got very serious music, experimentation, going on within that jazz milieu. An Ellington concert I particularly like is Carnegie Hall in 1948: a two-and-a-half-hour concert, which had absolutely everything: pop songs of the day; R & B; new suites, with very adventurous writing - all one after the other. Everything was there, and he seemed to quite enjoy all of it: he enjoyed entertaining the public and getting a good reaction, but he also wanted to say, “OK, you enjoyed that, now listen to this.”

You walk a tightrope between trying to exist commercially and trying to exist as an artist, which everybody has to try to handle in their own way. I think it is very important, and I suppose that's what I like about jazz - that it's got this sort of foothold in the real world. Composers in jazz tend to be people who don't sit in some university faculty writing the odd symphony every 10 years, then sending it off for somebody else to play – and they don't even have to *there* necessarily. It's much more the Ellington thing of writing a tune in the afternoon and trying it out in the evening, and having to run your own band if you want to hear your music played. I occasionally do write things now for other ensembles - Kate and I have written things like operas which we're not performing, other people are doing it. Still, the massive thing is this: have a band, and try and organise it, in order to play what you want to play.

We then went on to talk about the ‘star system’ in jazz.

MW: I don't know whether it's particularly fashionable, but I feel that I'm very against the star system, and the elitist feeling that can build up so easily around artists, around musicians. I mean, obviously, it's incredibly pertinent in the pop world, but also in the jazz world, to a degree: people achieve a sort of halo, a kind of eminence... They are brilliant, and of course they deserve all the prestige, or whatever, that they can earn for their efforts, but sometimes people get a greater sense of their importance than they should have. I very much feel more comfortable with the notion that we are contributors to the community in some way or other. We're not big stars, but there are people, thank God, in various countries around the place, who follow our music, buy all the records, and we meet them from time to time. So we know that there's something important – by us working on what we're trying to do and trying to perfect it and so on – and that this has meaning in terms of raising consciousness, raising people's sense of whatever – beauty? So I'm very much more inclined to that, and a little bit against the over self-importance of artists, really. That's all I can say on it!

And, then, about the avant-garde...

MW: Might be a can of worms...what are your thoughts?

DG: *I was thinking about the fact that someone like Paul Rutherford could be in your band, which is more mainstream, but at the same time could perform free improvisation, which is not very popular music. There seems to be a close relationship between players who can play on both the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ - do you think that's still the case now, or do you think that a division's opened up between the two?*

MW: Well, my sense is that it is more divided. Of course, when we all started, these divisions weren't a problem really - people had different ways of playing, and different interests. On the whole, as a composer, I've always liked that, because I've

always liked different attitudes - and indeed, you'll find that in the Village Band, with the two sax players. You've got Stan, on alto, who's a tremendous musician, but there's a bit of a distinction between him and Gary, on tenor, who's more drawn to the avant-garde. Yet they're both superb players of their instruments, and both very appreciative of what the other does, admiring and thinking 'yeah, that's something I can't do, but...'



Above: Stan Willis on alto sax

In a band, I think that sort of thing's fantastically interesting: one guy gets up and does one thing, and then the other gets up and does something completely different. Back to the Village Band, you've also got Mike, the trumpeter, who's a lead trumpet player really - he has an extraordinary range, and he could be leading a big band. It's a tremendous luxury for this band to have such a fantastically lead trumpet player- and he has a tremendous sense of blues. And then you've got Kate with her lyrics, which are sometimes very surreal, sometimes very political, sometimes quite bizarre - 'The Waxework Show' goes through a whole range of things, and very strange sort of poetic imagery is used in it - and then she'll also belt out a blues or whatever. I like it, when it's like a family of people who do different things.

So, for me, it isn't a problem embracing these different things, and I never really felt it was for Paul [Rutherford] either - we were very easily able to go from playing a hymn or a comic song to some free improvisation, and it wasn't a problem. I think I've always rather kept to that sort of feeling in the bands that I've had. Spiritually, I'm very close to the avant-garde players and that spirit, more than I am towards the mainstream - the kind of straightforward, swinging jazz that people play - I'm not really part of that at all, and haven't been for 40 years. So, I'm much more interested in the freer spirit, if you like: but, of course I'm a composer, so I write, and I'm bound to be involved with structure and planning, and all that kind of thing, which in a sense a free instrumentalist doesn't have to concern himself with.

I regret it if there are splits, I don't think they need, or needed, to happen - for me, anyway. One thing I suppose I've been working towards is creating a context in which freer and the more mainstream can co-exist, in which that relationship can somehow be made to work. Not everybody may think it does work, but I feel that is a healthier

situation, rather than people getting into these sort of ghettos. I mean, one example would be one of my favourite guys, Alan Barnes - a lovely sax player, who's been on and off in the big band. I remember various memorable occasions where we've played, and he's been sitting next to Chris Biscoe, who's very, very contemporary, and the two absolutely knock the spots off each-other - it's fantastic! Though you usually hear Alan in a fairly medium, mainstream sort of context, I feel that there's another dimension to him which he can easily get into, in another context. Then you could also take a superb musician like Peter King, known as the great bebopper – but put him in a free improvising context, and he's fantastic.

I don't think there's a problem with musicians - maybe with the public? I would like to see it all hold together: what with the problems of the world, and the problems of jazz, let's not have barriers where we can avoid them - let's try and hold it together, if we really believe in things. That's what I'd like to feel we [the Westbrooks] are trying to do.

We were now joined by Kate Westbrook, who was able to go into a little more detail on 'The Waxework Show', and how it came to be written.

David Grundy: *Earlier on, I didn't get to talk quite so much about the actual piece, 'The Waxework Show', so I was wondering what lies behind the lyrics and so on, because it's quite an unusual idea, this fusing of Victorian fairground and the internet.*

Kate Westbrook: Well, Mike wanted to write a piece for the Village Band expressly, and it just happened to be at the time when I got my first mac. Before then I'd been computer-illiterate, and it was just such an extraordinary new world, for someone of my age. I happened to reading a Dickens at the time in which there's a waxwork show, and the people seeing the waxwork show – all its horrors and beauties and possibilities, its dangers and so on – were as fascinated as I was by this new world. A waxwork show would hold no horrors for me, and so I thought about the fact that each generation has its own new world which opens up - Galileo or whatever it might be - full of horrors and dangers and beauties - and presumably it has the same impact on every generation. What comes next I can't imagine - perhaps space - and I both loved and hated and feared it.

DG: *So a fairly ambivalent reaction...*

KW: Yes: the juxtapositions you get are very extraordinary – when you're just surfing, you just get such odd bedfellows, with the information and the wonderful resource that there is. But, as for Google, there was a big article in the London Review of books about Google at the time they were in China. One really has mixed feelings about the way that they behaved, with the censorship. Also, their slogan is 'organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful' – That's quite a thing, verging on the megalomaniac, really – and their motto is 'don't be evil'; I mean if you have a motto and a slogan and they're that set in a halo, it's quite alarming... So I'm very fascinated by Google and I can see that it's a great tool for democracy, but I also think that it could, in the wrong hands, as they say, be a great risk to us all.

So I do have ambivalent feelings. I didn't want it to be a polemic, though, so I made it slightly Alice-in-Wonderland-y. I made the waxwork show the beginning of it, with the 'gizzards all gory' and so on: it's like creating a new life out of the wax, or the new products you can buy on the internet. I'm sure we'll soon be able to buy gene banks and that sort of thing.... Then, at the end of the piece, there are power-cuts and the whole thing goes BUNG... Wouldn't we all totally lost without technology, without the internet - we couldn't be without it now.

Anyway, I wrote the texts, and then put them on the piano for Mike to look at and, as often happens, he said 'I don't see that this can work', and it was put on the side for a little while. Then he came back and started writing, and of course, to me, he got exactly the right idiom. And then we started rehearsing with the Village Band, because we all live in Devon; it was a very nice process of rehearsing, and I changed some texts, Mike changed some music, and then Mike would show me these changes, and he would say, 'add another line here, or take another line out' - so it's a constant dialogue that evolves quite organically, really...

DG: *Is that the way your creative partnership works generally...do the lyrics come first, then the music, or...*

KW: Sometimes...If there were tunes of Mike's that I've thought were particularly lovely, I've written words: several songs came that way round. Or, as I was saying, Mike'll say sometimes, 'can you expand this, do another verse, because I want to do another development in the chord sequence, it needs another verse,' and sometimes he says 'can we cut that'...

MW: Yes: a lot of the time, I would say that the text is first - we did a full-scale opera, last year, 'Cape Gloss', and we've done another one that's going to be launched next February - at least, I've got the lyrics, but haven't written a note of music...['English Soup', to be premiered in February 2008]. It's going to have to happen - I think it's going to be one of those Rossinis...you know, the Barber of Seville was written in a fortnight - but he was awfully quick!



DG: *One question I wanted to ask was in relation to the idea of texts and so on...the role of literature in your collaborative work, such as your settings of William Blake, and how it feeds into the music.*

MW: There have been a few things, yes, though I don't think the literary sources have been the main thing, really. There were things like 'The Ass' (1985) – which came about when we were commissioned to do something for the D.H. Lawrence festival, based on his animal poetry. 'The Ass' was the first one really that we wrote together, we wrote a whole scenario an hour and a quarter long, which was done by a theatre company, and which we performed as well, and played on stage – it was really very enjoyable...

KW: You know, my favourite D.H. Lawrence poem is 'The Snake', which, if you look at it, is so perfect, is such a flawless piece, that I wouldn't be happy if Mike set it to music, because I don't think it needs music. Meanwhile, 'The Ass' is very flawed – it's actually not a very good poem – but it made a wonderful music theatre piece, because it has all those open edges and strange noises and things, which he's written out onomatopoeically, and it incorporated some of his letters from Taormina and so on.

As for Blake, well, I think Mike's settings of Blake are absolutely sublime. Some people do think they're too good poetry to be set but obviously Mike had to do it...

MW: Yes, that was not the sort of thing I thought of, but I was commissioned to do it by the National Theatre, and it wasn't something I'd thought of at all – I was completely ignorant about Blake's work, about his poetry, but the particular thing about them was that they lent themselves to this very simple song form, almost like pop music, and so they made up 'Glad Day'. There was also a piece like 'Cortege'...

Noa Corcoran-Tadd: ...*The European poetry piece, with poetry by people like Rimbaud and Lorca...*

MW: Yes, we had various friends in different countries who sent us poems.

KW: Neither of us is a good enough linguist to be able to read poems in another language, but because we'd travelled so much in the last 30 years – all over most of the known world, actually, but mostly in Europe – we'd made very good friends that we trust and who understand the music, and so we could safely say to them 'we want a short, Romantic poem, which you think would work here', and so it was a collective effort really.

DG: Yes, and I suppose then there's visual art – the 'Art Wolf' project for example. *[To Kate]* You're a painter, so you've got that visual training – is there a way in which the visual art influences the way you make the music, or are they separate?

KW: I think there's a degree of synaesthesia in all these things. Mike started as a painter as well, he was originally an artist, and it's just that I've carried on with it. We talk sometimes about the palette, and if I'm struggling with a painting Mike will come up in the studio and talk about it and sometimes the problem becomes the solution – you've got something not terribly interesting, but it's got a problem in it, and by dealing with that problem you overcome the dullness of it and find the solution, which takes you through onto another level. I think that happens to the music too, and then with the texts – we often refer to the way other disciplines work, in order to get through any knotty problem that we have in the one we're dealing with at the time. Is that true, Mike?

MW: Yes... You're a tremendous colourist, and there's an analogy between the colour and the harmony, the nuances of it, which is very parallel to what's going on in the painting.

KW: And sometimes Mike draws, in the early stages of a new piece: whirls, and busy bits, and tranquil bits, and down bits, so that he's got a kind of maquette with which to build the music.

In connection with this relation between sound and colour, I mentioned the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, who famously heard tones and chords as he painted, theorizing that yellow is the colour of middle-C on a piano, and a brassy trumpet blast; black is the colour of closure and the ends of things; and that combinations and associations of colors produce vibrational frequencies akin to chords played on a piano.

KW: I don't think it's as literal as that: in fact, I don't think it even arises, unless there's a question or problem which provokes that sort of discussion. Sometimes it just happens so naturally and organically that you don't need to go there, you don't need to exercise it.



Kate Westbrook on tenor horn and Mike Brewer on trumpet

DG: *[To Kate] Perhaps we could discuss your vocal style, which is different to mainstream of jazz vocal – it seems to have more in common with the Kurt Weill style than Billie Holiday or someone, with a great sense of drama, irony, changes of tone – like acting while you're singing, at the same time.*

KW: I think it did come out of the music-theatre of Brecht-Weill and Stravinsky's 'Soldier's Tale', a piece we both like very much. It takes a little while to find your own voice; in the early days, when I joined the band, I just played tenor horn, then I did a piece, 'Don't Explain', which was one of the first songs I did. I got very fascinated by not only working up the voice, up into the upper register, but also by working down the voice, so that I can sing in the baritone range – so, it opens up new

possibilities, some of them perhaps more theatrical than musical. But I always hope there is always music in performing any song, that it isn't the only thing, but there has to be a balance between the drama and the interpretation and the musicality of it – so that the theatricality doesn't swamp it. That is my aim: to keep the balance, which can sometimes mean even using the voice like an instrument: with, 'If You Could See My Now' [Mike Westbrook's arrangement of which is performed at the Village Band concerts as part of the 'All That Jazz' suite], that I don't really act all, I just sing it as it's written, because then it goes with the horns, and I think that's a better way to do it; if I did with great bravura I don't think it would really work – it's such a dense arrangement, the harmony is so interesting.

DG: *One final area was the political aspect present in certain parts of your work – the album 'Marching Song', and the William Blake poems, with his social criticism, relating to the mistreatment of chimney-sweepers and so on. Does jazz in particular lend itself as a form for expressing social and political disquiet, discourse?*

MW: Well, I think there've been very few examples – I think that's what drew us to the Brecht-Weill repertoire, because these are songs that matter. But there are lyrics in some of the American songbook – you probably know the whole story of Cole Porter's 'Love for Sale.' We were doing a lot of Brecht-Weill material - sometimes Kate was singing in the original German, sometimes in translation, and a song like 'Pirate Jenny', which we still do quite a bit. And then we thought let's see what happens if we translate 'Love for Sale' into German, and it's just like 'Pirate Jenny' – a really strong song about prostitution and exploitation, once you take it out of it's Broadway milieu. And that was a very important turning point. I mean, the song's been played to death by every jazz musician under the song, and also sung by people like Ella Fitzgerald and all these kind of people– you'd listen to it and think, 'this isn't a song about prostitution': you wouldn't know what it was about, really. So I think it was important to put it into that Brechtian sort of context...

Actually, it was Cole Porter's favourite, of all the ones that he wrote: he really thought he'd got something there. It was very controversial: when the show first opened in New York, 'Love for Sale' was sung by a white singer, and critics were completely outraged. The song was banned, and they changed it to a black girl singing it, to make it more simple, and it couldn't be played on the radio for years, and that kind of thing – it really touched a nerve. I mean, most of the time, Cole Porter wrote this wonderful escapist, romantic music, but there were exceptions, like 'Love For Sale', and some of the other songs also...I think that's what we were seeking at the time, as we developed some material.

I think one of the really most important works is 'London Bridge is Broken Down', which is going to be re-issued in the New Year (originally released in 1987, it will be available again in February 2008), and I'm really looking forward to that coming out again, because that really went further than a lot of things. It had a classical orchestra, and a European kind of feel – it's very strong, the anti-war sentiment is tremendously strong. Nearly all the material is very hard-hitting.

KW: We heard something that touched us very much: one of the local student radio stations, on the day the wall came down in '89, they played the German section of London Bridge, as the wall was coming down.

MW: I think there's an awful lot in that, and although it's of it's time – there's a

whole section about Wenceslas Square, in Prague. The square's now full of McDonalds and so on, but in those days, it was a huge long boulevard with a kind of diamond running up the whole of the middle, dominated by this very impressive statue of the guy who founded the republic. But anyway, the point was, the night we were in Berlin – a cold, November night, deserted – there was this incredible feeling of the reality, we knew, we could sense the human struggle. We were in a strange situation, playing at a jazz festival, which was managed by the state, and it was held once a year, at this amazing place, an old ballroom, and you'd have all-night playing with these German jazz bands and these bands from all over Europe, but it was only just brief moment a year when everybody could get together; it was closed off the rest of the time. So there were all kind of – although there weren't any lyrics in that piece – it was very much about that time...

KW: The only lyrics I wrote were for London Bridge itself, which is the child's rhyme, which I wrote when Thatcher was in power. I found in the Opie book about children's nursery rhymes (The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, edited by Iona and Peter Opie), that they built a baby into the base to make it stand (as a magical charm to placate the water spirits, who would object to a bridge built, as it was an 'invasion' of their territory). So that's why I used it as a kind of Thatcherite metaphor – I got my Margaret-Thatcher voice on for that...

MW: Yes, the dialogue between the proletariat and Margaret... On the whole, though, I don't think we tend to focus on the social and political side so much.



That brought to an end our conversation with Mike and Kate Westbrook. I'd like to thank them for their patience and willingness to give the interview.

PAUL RUTHERFORD TRIBUTE

In a year which saw the deaths of many great jazz musicians, one of the most poignant was that of trombonist Paul Rutherford. He had technical skill in abundance, pioneering the use of multiphonics and vocalised techniques on the instrument. Not only this, but he was extremely versatile: he could be heard in context as wide ranging as the Globe Unity and London Jazz Composer's Orchestras, the Mike Westbrook Concert Band, rhythm and blues band The Detroit Spinners, and, for a short time, prog/jazz-rock band Soft Machine, as well as numerous other large and small groups. He was equally at home playing blues, jazz-rock, straight-ahead jazz, big band music, and free improvisation, although he increasingly came to concentrate on the latter as the main focus of his musical energies ("I still love playing music in an orchestra, but really my love is just to get on stage and flick the bugle, you know," he told the American online magazine *All About Jazz*, in a wryly deadpan style).

A founder member of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble in 1966, he was blessed with a seemingly endless inventiveness. "Of all the players," Derek Bailey told his biographer Ben Weston, Rutherford "could produce genuine surprises. If anybody at that point qualified to be called a free player, it was Paul." In contrast to some other improvisers, who tended to prepare some sort of sketch, some mental plan before they went performed, Rutherford claimed that "I want to go out not knowing what will happen, just getting onto the platform and playing. It will happen anyway." Perhaps the purest example of the free-improvising ethos around.

I mentioned that his loss was a particularly poignant one, and this is why. Though he was a busy man in the 70s and 80s, work dried up towards the end of his life, though he appeared fairly regularly in gigs at the Red Rose in London (including the 2007 Freedom of the City festival, his last public appearance). In a way, what's sadder than the fact that he's died is the fact that, despite being one of the foremost free improvisers on the scene, of the same calibre as Derek Bailey, Evan Parker and the like, he was unable to get regular work in the last few years of his life, leaving him depressed and struggling.

The *All about Jazz* interview I've quoted from before found him in a particular pessimistic frame of mind: "I just get so depressed about it—Christ, I know how good I am, but it doesn't do me any good money-wise. I'm in the worst economic situation now that I've been in my life. There are things you take for granted—sometimes I go out for an Indian meal, and I know it sounds silly, but I can't even think about that now. Inviting a lady out for a drink or a meal is totally out of the question—I can't afford it. Simple as that. I'm on pension now—I'm 66 years old—and I'm having trouble with the pension. I'm seriously, seriously depressed and I'm just looking forward to getting to the States."

Not exactly a happy way in which to remember him, but then again, there's no point in sugaring the pill. Improvised music has never found much of an audience in Britain, and, beyond a small group of devoted fans, is never likely to find much financial support, so musicians whose beliefs lead them to commit themselves to such non-commercially viable work are not in for an easy ride.

Still, there are many good things to remember too. Following is a selection of reminiscences, by people who knew and worked with Paul Rutherford. As will be seen, he was valued not only for his musical contributions, but for his personality, his wit, kindness, charm, and dogged commitment. Over, then, to Paul's friends and colleagues.

(Note: an article about the memorial concert give at the Red Rose in London can be found in the gig reviews section of the magazine.)

Trevor Watts

Improvising musician (mainly alto sax); one of the founder members of the SME



SME (Spontaneous Music Ensemble) at Betterbooks Basement (London), March 23 1967. L to R: Paul Rutherford (trombone), Derek Bailey (amplified electric guitar), Chris Cambridge (double bass), John Stevens (drums & cymbals), Trevor Watts (oboe), Evan Parker (tenor saxophone). Photo © Jak Kilby

My association with Paul started when we both met at the RAF School of Music in Uxbridge in 1958. That's how long I knew him. I agree that he was under rated, but then we all are under rated to be honest in this country. Promoters' eyes are always looking elsewhere.

There's a lack of an open attitude to music [where] the content...is not dictated to by pressure from elsewhere. That's why I play a music that is hard to classify for most, but they all manage to put it in some bag or other according to their narrow view of music. Doesn't matter what the music is, it's got to have passion, involvement and creativity amongst other things. I don't feel that free form musicians have more of this than others. Some do, some don't. There's other musicians of other persuasions that have all these assets, but people into that music wouldn't like because of what they normally do. Like for instance Peter Knight of Steeleye Span. But when Pete & I improvised together it was always a good experience for us both, and there's some evidence to bear in a new recording that'll come out on Hi4Head, which is a live improv gig and nothing else. The music gels for the whole hour we play because we're both flexible enough to let the music happen in the middle and not where it could be perhaps more comfortable for one or the other. So trust was there, which to me is another major factor.

Well I'm not sure what anecdotes to tell about Paul. A lot of them are half remembered. There was one time when we were still in the RAF Band, but this time

based at RAF Cosford. That's where they now have athletics in the hanger where we used to do band practice. I bet you can see it now: Paul Rutherford, John Stevens & I marching up & down in our nice uniforms. Anyway we were to do a job in Belfast and we had a mutual Southern Irish friend who came from Dublin. His name was Paddy of course. So after the gig we went by train to Dublin and stayed in our friend's parents' house on a working class housing estate and went to the local working mens club. You can imagine in those days the IRA was till pretty active and whilst we were having a drink Paul stood up and said "Here's to the Queen". Well you could hear a pin drop for a moment, until he turned the whole thing around and let people know that basically it was a wind up, so he didn't mind the odd risk or two, just like his trombone playing. Also as you know, Paul was a dedicated Communist of the old school all his life, as was his Father, who I also knew. That wasn't the only thing he took from his Father. He loved his drink just as much and his Dad was ALWAYS propping up the bar in his local in Blackheath, and we'd both go in and have a drink and natter together.

Other little story was that when we got out of the Air Force in 1963 Paul & I used to get together a lot and work and develop ideas in his parents' house in Blackheath, some of which were to be part of the very first Spontaneous Music Ensemble's recording "Challenge". And I remember on one occasion I went over to his house at a pre-arranged time, and he stood at the door and said "Do you mind if we don't do anything today Trevor as I don't feel like seeing anyone today", and that was measure of how depression could get hold of him. The fact that I went all the way over there couldn't even be part of the equation, and I'd known Paul for 5 years by then, so I accepted it. I think he suffered from time to time through this depression, the drink didn't help, and none of it helped his relationships with women. Getting lost in the music was always a bit of relief for him.

Also when we were in the Air Force in Cologne Paul would be the first person to go out and buy the latest John Coltrane recording fresh off the press, and we'd all sit around and check it out. By all, I mean John Stevens, Paul & myself in the main, not everybody was into that music.

STEVE BERESFORD

Improvising musician: piano, electronics, and miscellaneous instruments.

Without wanting to make it sound boring, what was important was his devotion to playing, more than theatrics. Of course, with this type of music, you're a composer as well as an improviser; organisation is a big part, and with Paul it was very much about how you organise music. Everything was devoted to that. There wasn't any theatrical aspect to it: he was just interested in making music devoid of clichés. Of course, to some extent we all fall back on clichés, but Paul was brilliant at avoiding these, at avoiding those things that sounded clever but weren't really, and that was really inspiring.

He was a sweet, gentle guy, very funny, and very set in his political views. The music and the politics were separate, though: he would have played the same music whatever his political views. It was interesting at his funeral to see that his political friends and colleagues were actually quite shocked at the avant-garde music.

His politics was quite old-fashioned: if we'd sat down and discussed what he thought of Stalin we would have probably had a massive argument...but we never did!

VERYAN WESTON

Improvising pianist.

Paul was a very sweet person to be with and a very committed socialist. As well as being a groundbreaking solo improviser on the trombone, he was an inspiring musician to play with and always to listen to. This country is very good at grinding artists down in to isolation and hopelessness, and Paul, amongst other friends, was a victim of this social and cultural irresponsibility. However, his music WILL live on and inspire others to be creative musicians.



MIKE WESTBROOK

Pianist, composer, arranger, and big-band leader. (Note - The following was originally printed in 'The Smith's Academy Informer' (Issue, 80, 2007), a quarterly journal with information about all Westbrook projects, tours & recordings. More information online, at: http://www.westbrookjazz.co.uk/smiths_informer.shtml)

I first met Paul in the mid-60s at The Old Place and The Little Theatre Club in London. We worked together until the late 70s. As well as various small groups, he was a member of my **Concert Band**, where he formed a great trombone partnership with **Malcolm Griffiths**, and of my larger **Orchestra**. He was a major soloist on such albums as *Release*, *Marching Song* and *Metropolis*.

When I formed a street band, The **Brass Band**, around '73/'74, Paul was one of the first to join. The approach of that group was basically to play whatever any member wanted to play, when and where anyone asked us to play. This was liberating, musically

and politically. The Brass Band gave space for all the talents of those involved. This suited Paul who, while already established as one of the major improvisers on the scene, had many other talents and interests.

He enjoyed playing New Orleans numbers, arranging Renaissance pieces for the band, declaiming William Blake's poetry and singing Brecht songs, as well as writing nonsense lyrics and generally exploiting the comic possibilities in any situation. Paul, one of the greatest musicians I've ever worked with, was also one of the funniest. With Paul, the seriousness and the jokes were just sides of the same coin. The musician who could move you to tears with the beauty of his playing one minute was the clown who could reduce you to helpless laughter the next. A truly Brechtian juxtaposition of High Art and Low Comedy. This duality, this interleaving of opposites was always present in his playing. He had the ability to play within the structure of the material, while yet taking it somewhere else altogether. A simple example - when he soloed on *Creole Love Call* with the Big Band, he was playing both inside and outside the Blues. And however far things went, Paul could always take them further out.

Those early years with the Brass Band seem like a Golden Age of travelling and playing all kinds of music, in all kinds of situations all over Europe. In that time we became very close friends, Phil Minton, Kate Westbrook, Dave Chambers, Paul, and I. Memories come crowding back of our many adventures, musical and geographical. One day maybe the full story will be told of what someone once described as our 'Wandering Everyman Troupe'.

Eventually things changed. Whether as a result of outside political and cultural forces, or inevitable developments in the music, the scene became polarised. Where it had been possible for musicians from different backgrounds and with different approaches to march together under the same banner, now people started putting down boundaries. The implication was that "While all musicians are free, some musicians are definitely freer than others"- to misquote George Orwell. When Paul decided to leave it was partly a natural move to concentrate on his solo career. But, as he explained at the time, it was also a response to pressure from those hard-liners who maintained that his credibility as an improvising musician was being compromised by his membership of the Brass Band. Given this dilemma, Paul made the only possible choice. And it was the right choice as his artistic achievement and international recognition testify. Sadly we seldom met again. As often seems the case with bands, when you've been very close but there's nothing left to play, there's little left to say.

I'm grateful to have known Paul and worked with him through such an exciting and creative period. It was a time of hope, when all seemed possible. Latterly when idealism gave way to pragmatism we were all in trouble. Some of Paul's contemporaries found ways of adjusting to the changing scene. The path that Paul had chosen didn't include a contingency plan.

On tour I remember Paul not only as a wonderful trombonist and euphonium player but a warm and generous friend, full of wicked good humour, and an excellent drinking companion. As things got more difficult, however, in more recent times the jokes became bitter. And the drink nearly killed him in 2000. He pulled through, and when Kate and I saw him at his benefit gig at the 100 Club and talked a bit about old times, he was frail but just the same Paul as ever was. Soon he was back travelling and playing. But these are cruel times for the creative artist, and with ever diminishing

opportunities a sense of hopelessness can easily take over. There was no turning back for Paul, nothing to fall back on. He risked everything to be free. And his life, cut off too short as it was, was yet a triumph of the creative spirit.

Paul Rutherford changed music and changed lives for ever. I know he changed and enriched mine. Rest in Peace.

I'll leave the last word to **Kate Westbrook**, who briefly spoke about Paul when interviewed after The Village Band's concert last year (see main feature: interview with Kate and Mike Westbrook). She recalled a time when the Brass Band played at a home for mentally disturbed children. One child became particularly attached to Paul, and would follow him wherever he went. Of course, she was heartbroken when he had to leave. An example of his great personal charm, and his ability to break through musical and emotional barriers, and reach across to the listener – a quality that appealed to a child as much as it did to the most extreme followers of avant-garde music.

After telling the anecdote, Kate Westbrook said: "Don't make it sentimental. Paul wouldn't want that." I hope I've managed to do so.



With thanks to all the musicians who contributed their memories of Paul Rutherford.

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“Criticism is always the easiest art.”

- Cornelius Cardew

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 FORCH – Spin Networks
 FORTUNE, SONNY – You and the Night and the Music
 FRIEDLANDER, ERIC – Block Ice and Propane
 GLASGOW IMPROVISERS ORCHESTRA WITH BARRY GUY - Falkirk
 GUSTAFSSON, MATS/ YOSHIMI – Words on the Floor
 HANCOCK, HERBIE – River: The Joni Letters
 HARGREAVES, PHIL/WEYANT, GLENN – Friday Morning Everywhere
 HIS NAME IS ALIVE – Sweet Earth Flower: A Tribute to Marion Brown
 MARSALIS, WYNTON – From the Plantation to the Penitentiary

METHENY, PAT/MEHLDAU, BRAD – Metheny/Mehldau Quartet
MILLER, MARCUS – Free
MITCHELL, ROSCOE – Composition/Improvisation Nos. 1,2 & 3
MOSTLY OTHER PEOPLE DO THE KILLING – Shamokin!
MONCUR III, GRACHAN – Inner Cry Blues
MURRAY, DAVID (BLACK SAINT QUARTET) – Sacred Ground
O’ LEARY, MARK – On the Shore
PARKER, EVAN/SHIPP, MATTHEW – Abbey Road Duos
PARKER, WILLIAM/DRAKE, HAMID – Summer Snow
PARKER, WILLIAM (DOUBLE QUARTET) – Alphaville Suite
PARKER, WILLIAM (RAINING ON THE MOON) – Cornmeal Dance
POTTER, STEVE – Follow the Red Line: Live at the Village Vanguard
SHEPP, ARCHIE – Gemini
SOIL AND ‘PIMP’ SESSIONS – Pimpoint
TYNER, MCCOY – McCoy Tyner Quartet
SCHNEIDER, MARIA – Sky Blue
SHIPP, MATTHEW – Piano Vortex
SURMAN, JOHN – The Spaces in Between
VARIOUS ARTISTS - Free Jazz.org Sampler, Vol. II
WARE, DAVID.S - Renunciation
WASSERMANN, UTE – Birdtalking
WEASEL WALTER - Firestorm
WEBER, EBERHARD – Stages of a Long Journey
WESTBROOK, MIKE (VILLAGE BAND)– The Waxeywork Show
WYATT, ROBERT – Comicopera
ZORN, JOHN – From Silence to Sorcery

Historical/ Re-Issues

BRAXTON, ANTHONY/FONDA, JOE – Duets 1995
BROTZMANN, PETER – The Complete Machine Gun Sessions
CHERRY, DON – Live at the Café Montmartre 1966
COLTRANE, JOHN – My Favorite Things: Coltrane Live in Newport
COXHILL, LOL/MILLER, STEVE – The Story So Far/Oh Really?
DAVIS, MILES – The Complete On the Corner Sessions
ERVIN, BOOKER – The Freedom Book
GREENE, BURTON – Bloom in the Commune
HILL, ANDREW - Compulsion
HOWARD, NOAH – The Black Ark
HOWARD, NORMAN – Burn Baby Burn
MAUPIN, BENNIE – The Jewel in the Lotus
MINGUS, CHARLES – Cornell ’64
MURRAY, SUNNY – Sunny Murray
PARKER, EVAN/ LEWIS, GEORGE/LYTTON, PAUL – Hook, Drift and Shuffle
RA, SUN – Night of the Purple Moon
RA, SUN – Strange Strings
TIPPET, KEITH – Ovary Lodge
TRIO OF DOOM (John McLaughlin, Jaco Pastorius, Tony Williams)– Trio of Doom

Reviewers: David Grundy, Massimo Ricci, Stef Gijssels, Ian Thumwood, Noa Corcoran-Tadd, Michael Ardiaolo, Henry Kuntz, Will Layman, Seth Watter, Daniel Melnick, Andrew Forbes, Marcello Carlin, Anthony Whiteford

A 2007 TOP 10: MY ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

By David Grundy

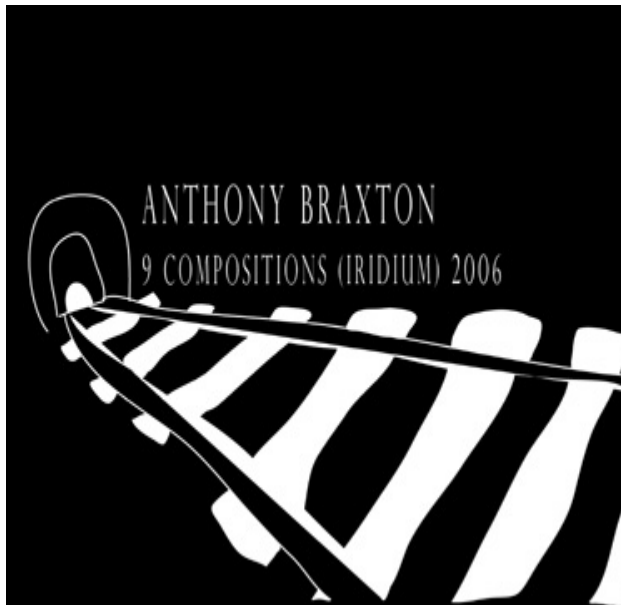
Well, to start off the reviews, here are my albums of the year. By no means a definitive list, it is instead a personal selection of those records that have provided me with the most rewarding listening experiences over the past twelve months. Who knows, some of the music I've dismissed may turn out to be remembered and appreciated in years to come...I can but try to offer my humble opinion!

When trying to compile this sort of list, one inevitably thinks of the question: what kind of a year was it for jazz? One like any other, I suppose, with many, many solid releases (of which the reviews in this magazine provide only a snapshot). Established figures continued to turn out high-quality music, most notably with the welcome return of underrated trumpeter Charles Tolliver, leading a fantastic, high-energy big band session, while the likes of John Surman and Evan Parker (one of the most prolific artists around) explored a more considered, brooding approach. An up-and-coming artist who really will be one to watch is trumpeter Peter Evans: his music balances tradition and the avant-garde with the spirit, if not the vocabulary, of Jackie McLean and Andrew Hill's 'inside/outside' approach during the 1960s.

Perhaps most notable, though, was a monumental work that was strangely missing from most other critics' end of year lists, and the coverage in both the jazz and classical press: as Anthony Braxton's *9 Compositions (Iridium) 2006*. I personally haven't had time to fully appreciate and absorb it, yet: it's the sort of music that demands the same full and absolute engagement given by the performers, from the listener, and it's hard to find the time to devote this much attention to every single disc in a large box-set. In a way, my failure is hardly surprising, when you consider that it is basically the summary of Braxton's musical journey so far – a journey that has already been ridiculously productive and prolific. He is a man with a claim to be at least considered as the greatest musician to walk the planet this century, or any century, and this set of records is an incredibly significant piece of work in his output. And I guess that alone would be quite enough for any year!

Read on for the reviews...

1. Anthony Braxton - *9 Compositions (Iridium) 2006*
2. Charles Tolliver Big Band - *With Love*
3. John Surman - *The Spaces in Between*
4. William Parker - *Cornmeal Dance*
5. Evan Parker/Matthew Shipp - *Abbey Road Duos*
6. Peter Brotzmann/Mats Gustafsson/Paale-Nilsson Love – *The Fat is Gone*
7. His Name is Alive – *Sweet Earth Flower*
8. fORCH – *Spin Networks*
9. Peter Evans – *The Peter Evans Quartet*
10. Robert Wyatt - *Comicopera*



**ANTHONY BRAXTON 12+1 TET – 9
COMPOSITIONS (IRIDIUM) 2006**

Label: Firehouse 12 records

Release Date: March 2007

Tracklist:

Composition 350 (CD 1); Composition 351 (CD 2); Composition 352 (CD 3); Composition 353 (CD 4); Composition 354 (CD 5); Composition 355 (CD 6); Composition 356 (CD 7); Composition 357 (CD 8); Composition 358 (CD 9).

Personnel: Anthony Braxton: alto, soprano, and soprano sax, clarinet, Eb contralto clarinet; Taylor Ho Bynum: cornet, flugelhorn, trumpet, piccolo and bass trumpets, mutes, shell; Andrew Raffo Dewar: soprano and c-melody sax, clarinet; James Fei:

alto and soprano sax, bass clarinet; Mary Halvorson: electric guitar; Steve Lehman: alto and soprano sax; Nicole Mitchell: flute, alto and bass flutes, piccolo, voice; Jessica Pavone: viola, violin; Reut Regev: trombone, flugelhorn, mutes, cymbals; Jay Rozen: tuba, euphonium, mutes, toys; Sara Schoenbeck: bassoon, suona; Aaron Siegel: percussion, vibraphone; Carl Testa: bass, bass clarinet.

Additional Information: 9 CD + 1 DVD boxset, recorded at Iridium Jazz Club, New York, during a week-long residency in March 2006, in which he gave the world premieres of his Compositions 350-58 with 12+1 tet. [Recording Dates: CD 1-2 (16th March), CD 3-4 (17th March), CD 5-7 (18th March), CD 8-9, DVD (19th March).] The DVD features Jason Guthartz's documentary 'What Kind of 'Tet?' (which includes footage from the nine sets and a Braxton lecture), and a complete performance of Composition 358. Also included in the set is a 56-page booklet, containing an extensive collection of essays, commentary and biographical information. Available as a digital download from emusic.com.

Anthony Braxton's Ghost Trance Music has not only encompassed but fundamentally transformed ("trance-formed") his entire music system. His GTM compositions can scarcely be considered "compositions," at least not in any usual sense of the word. They constitute what Braxton call "a continuous state music... a trans-temporal music that can be played in any tempo and a trans-idiomatic music in terms of its structural postulates.... Each composition becomes like a melody that doesn't start and doesn't end." (Braxton to Graham Locke, Notes to *Composition 192*, Leo Records).

In other words, linear form has been set aside in favour of ritual form. Necessary structural determinants (in terms of overall movement from A to B to Z) have been let go of in favor of duration (time), the only underlying determinant of ritual form. In the Ghost Trance Music presented at the Iridium, an hour glass was turned over at the beginning of each piece to set a general time parameter. (Duration doesn't tell us what music will be played but it sets the open framework within which music can take place.)

This shift in musical form (change in essence) mystified almost everyone when Braxton first presented it in 1995. Drawing on his studies of Native American music and Ghost Dance rituals of the late 1800s, Braxton's "first species" GTM was built on a steady stream of eighth notes that simulated the repetitiveness of Native American drumming. The GTMs have gone through three subsequent permutations, each interjecting new irregular rhythmic complexity into the steady line, culminating in the latest "accelerator class"/ "accelerator whip" GTM forms that are the basis of the nine

pieces presented on the *Iridium* box set. These compositions, the last of the Ghost Trance melodies that Braxton intends to write, have become so complex now (speeding up, slowing down, twisting and contorting) that one might be hard pressed to identify them as even related to the first species forms.

Jonathan Piper, in his excellent notes to the *Iridium* set, points to this development of the melodic line as the main distinguishing feature of the different classes of GTM. That is true enough, but equally important in their evolution was Braxton's decision (late in first species GTM) in the pieces he presented at Yoshi's (1997) to open the music up in unprecedented ways.

It is helpful to recall that one of Braxton's first intentions with the Ghost Trance Music was to access the Ghost. From his conversation with Francesco Martinelli, *Sextet Istanbul 1995* (Braxton House): "I believe that one of the problems of this time period is that we don't understand the old Ghost, the old masters. We have been given a viewpoint of the masters that takes away the aura of the Ghosts. All of it looks like artifacts and more and more children are not able to gain some sense of the real culture. But trance music means that individuals can do individual experiences and they can tap into anything, including the essence of the masters, of the old masters." (Within the Ghost Trance pieces, Braxton seems at times to be playing from another state of being; his solos, especially on alto, are right on the sonic edge.)

In order to allow that "tapping in," Braxton had already built into the GTM points in the melodic line where players could move into improvisation, another composition, or into other ritual states (factoring in elements of theatre, body movement, stage placement, and so on). Yet until the Yoshi's dates, these open elements were well in the background of the main repetitive melodic line. You could hear them beginning to come to the forefront near the end of *Tentet New York 1996* (Braxton House), but at Yoshi's, for the first time, they take centre stage.

As he had done previously with his quartet, Braxton actively moved to include (as possibility) within the Ghost Trance Music all of the music that he had ever composed! But the implications of such a move with the GTM were more far reaching than with the quartet, for the effect was to now place all of his music within ritual time rather than within linear time; and whereas with the quartet, the different compositions that were played together almost always ran alongside each other, now pieces of pieces began to move continuously in and out of the music, restructuring the trance form along the way.

Concurrent with this, Braxton began to break down the Ghost Trance Music hierarchically; subgroups of three and sub-leaders were designated within the larger group who could make decisions about when and where and which parts of which pieces were to be included within the main compositional form. (In what would become standard practice, Braxton also provided the players with "secondary" compositional material, miniatures for trios, that they could opt to include at any time.) As much or more than any transformation of GTM species lines, this change marked the actual beginning of the new reality of where Braxton's music now stands. With good reason, Braxton refers to the Ghost Trance Music on the *Iridium* box set as "THE point of definition in my work so far."



Photo: © John Rogers

What do the nine *Iridium* pieces sound like? They are nothing less than new orchestral archetypes. The Ghost Trance Music compositions are the most formally complex of any, and they are the most structurally open. In the new “accelerator whip” pieces prepared for the *Iridium* dates, Braxton included additional points in the written lines from which players might choose to “exit” into improvisation or into some other music (“strategy”). That means there is more space for the players, working from their non-hierarchical vantage points, to improvise and to create the total form of the music from the ground up.

Each GTM composition suggests some type of rhythmic direction and movement that influences, ever so subtly, the way a piece will take shape. But the way the melodic line sounds is open to considerable interpretation by the players, each of whom is able to play it in any clef or tempo. In the later compositions, the players veer more toward the unisons we became accustomed to hearing with earlier GTM forms, but there’s always some contrary pull and tug from somewhere in the group. The first evening’s pieces, “350” and “351,” open with wonderfully out-of-synch and disassociated ensembles that inform the players’ dense approaches to the compositions. I love these! Piece “350” especially maintains a spirited sense of invention throughout.

The orchestral range of the 12+1-tet is underlined by its broad instrumentation; it is the most varied of any group to have played the Ghost Trance Music. The music itself, as players navigate in and out of the main compositional line, takes shape through motivic and textural addition and subtraction. That sounds simple, but the players must make the choices of *what* to add or *what* to subtract in order to create engaging music. That they succeed in doing so throughout nine pieces of music over four evenings is a tribute to their musicianship and resourcefulness.

It is difficult to characterize any individual piece, as each one moves through so much musical territory. But certain things stand out. On the first evening, Thursday, we feel the players’ emotional edge, the underlying passion and enthusiasm for what they are doing; the music is a little wild! By the final evening, Sunday, that edge has settled into crisp execution; we sense the players’ full-blown confidence in their abilities. Rich and tonally varied orchestral voicings emerge, and there is even a brief fantasia-like sequence midway through the closing set, piece “358.”

Friday evening’s compositions feature notably fast thematic renditions; the second piece, “353,” nearly hits a groove! That happens in no small part from the way in which earlier Ghost Trance Music forms find their way (as optional inputs) into the new accelerator class GTM; rather than define and virtually contain the musical space, as they

did previously, the repetitive melodic lines now provide momentum, here and elsewhere, to propel the music forward.

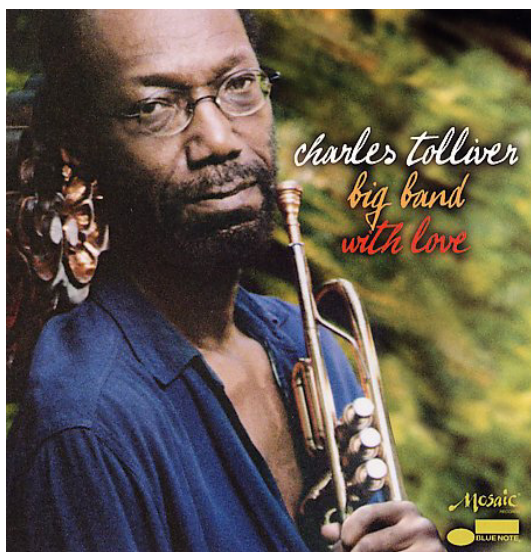
Saturday's three consecutive shows physically tax the players' creative powers; they respond with a highly organic opening set that moves from ensemble density to a near meditative state. Piece "355," next, is likely the "quietest" of all the *Iridium* sets; the music feigns this way and that, deliberately pacing itself, then interjects some boisterous Mingus-like ensemble work near the final section. The third set, with the players in "dreamtime," features a staggered opening that sets the piece's tone; the music expands contracts, slows, stops, rides propulsive waves toward a calm conclusion.

Giving over to the orchestral flow, Braxton's moments as soloist are fewer and shorter than usual. He occasionally chooses, however, to offer subtle musical direction to the group, like contrarily suggesting a neo-romantic vision in the midst of some dense ensemble; other times, while circular breathing, he squeezes out raspy, throaty horn vocalizations to give the music a much needed edge. Yet these new realizations of Braxton's music are not so much extensions of instrumental language or technique as they are extensions of the logic of orchestral form (Orchestral Ghost!).

What is interesting is how that logic may transfer back into individual improvisation; for once linear form has been interrupted at the overall level of what we have heard (and internalized), players may find it emotionally unsatisfying to return to more usual ways of formulating sound. In that case, "trance-formation" would have come full circle.

Note: The DVD included in the *Iridium* box features Jason Guthartz's hour-long film of Mr. Braxton at Columbia University outlining the theoretical basis of the GTM. A performance film of "*Composition 358*," the last of the nine *Iridium* pieces, is also included and is essential viewing. The players musical decision-making processes are illuminated, and we see how much fun they are having bringing the Ghost Trance Music to life.

Review by Henry Kuntz, June 2007, originally published at the following web addresses: <http://henrykuntz.wordpress.com/2007/09/26/anthony-braxton-12-1tet/> and <http://www.m-etropolis.com/wordpress/p/anthony-braxton-121tet/en/> For an archive of further articles by Henry Kuntz, please see <http://bells.free-jazz.net/>



CHARLES TOLLIVER BIG BAND – *WITH LOVE*

Label: Blue Note

Release Date: January 2007

Tracklist: Rejoicin'; With Love; Round Midnight; Mourmin' Variations; Right Now; Suspicion; Hit the Spot

Personnel: Charles Tolliver: trumpet; David Guy: lead trumpet; Chris Albert, Keyon Harrold, David Weiss, James Zollar: trumpets; Joe Fiedler, Clark Gayton, Stafford Hunter, Jason Jackson: trombones; Aaron Johnson: bass trombone, tuba; Todd Bashore: alto sax, clarinet; Jimmy Cozier: alto sax; Craig Handy: alto & soprano saxes, clarinet, flute; Billy Harper: tenor sax; Bill Saxton: tenor sax, clarinet; Howard Johnson: baritone sax, bass clarinet; Stanley Cowell, Robert Glasper: piano; Cecil McBee: acoustic bass; Victor Lewis: drums; Chad Tolliver: guitar (6).

Additional Information: Charles Tolliver's recordings with the band 'Music Inc' (co-led with Stanley Cowell) appear on the legendary musician-run label 'Strata-East', which released some of the finest, and most neglected, 1970s jazz recordings. Though out of print, old vinyl rips can be downloaded in MP3 format from the internet (see feature on jazz blogs). 'Music Inc Live at Slugs', Vols. 1 & 2, and 'Music Inc. Live in Tokyo' have been re-issued in a Mosaic select 3-disc box-set, available in a limited run of 5,000 copies, at [http://www.mosaicrecords.com/discography.asp?number=MS-020&price=\\$44.00&copies=3%20CDs](http://www.mosaicrecords.com/discography.asp?number=MS-020&price=$44.00&copies=3%20CDs)

There's something about great jazz recordings that, when you first hear them, they just sound right. This new offering from 2006 by trumpeter Charles Tolliver's big band is one such example, the band playing a selection of arrangements that could quite easily come from the "Golden Era" of jazz creativity that was the 1960s. In fact, some of the arrangements do hark back to the 1970's when Tolliver was leading an earlier edition of this outfit. The track "Right now" started life even earlier as a chart for a 1964 Jackie McLean recording session.

To be honest, having caught this band during their tour of the European Jazz festivals in the summer, I was fully expectant that this record would be one of this year's finest and it certainly captures the sheer excitement and adrenalin that they mustered in concert. The scores displayed that hint of darkness that is a vital ingredient for some of the finest jazz and the power with which the brass punctuated the arrangements gave the impression of McCoy Tyner's powerful and swinging comping mutated into the big band genre. However, by far the most discernable influence on the leader's writing is Gerald Wilson with whom he studied in Los Angeles in the Sixties. Wilson's pedigree is immense taking in work for the twin bastions of Duke Ellington and Count Basie as well as having initially made his mark with the semi-mythical Jimmie Lunceford's orchestra way back in the early 1940's. Small wonder that this disc by his pupil should fit so snugly into the traditions of classic big band jazz! Like Wilson, Tolliver has stripped the scores of superfluous ensemble writing, leaving the reed and brass sections available to state the themes and punctuate the music with interjections that serve to propel ensemble onward. As a result, this music exhibits a masculine and muscular quality with the cast of veritable soloists carried away on top of the boisterous riffing that is such a feature throughout this record. All the themes bar one were composed by the leader and their close adherence to the tenets of Gerald Wilson's unfussy style make them instantly memorable. The most interesting chart on this disc is "Mournin' Variations" which opens and closes with a folk-like melody scored for unaccompanied woodwinds, the effect of which is quite beautiful. After a following brass fanfare and plenty of drums, the band settles into the kind of groove beloved of Coltrane's classic quartet, tenor maestro Bill Harper taking the initial solo honours. Followed later by Stafford Hunter's trombone, Charles Tolliver's trumpet and the piano of Stanley Cowell, the head of steam built up by the band behind them makes you wish that more big bands would play with this intensity.

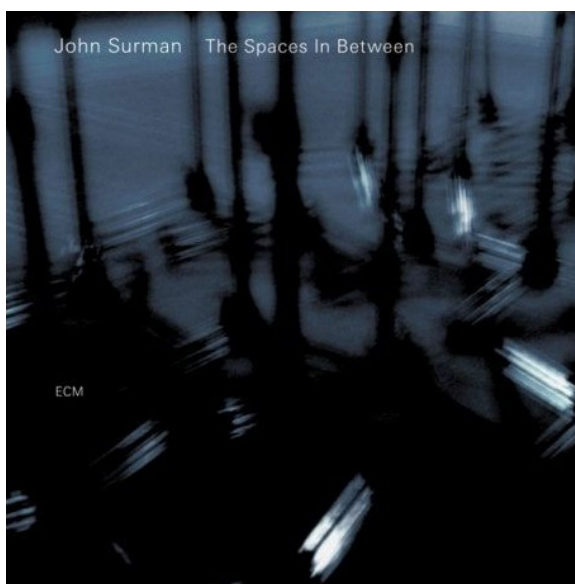
Despite its title, there is nothing romantic or dreamy about the seven numbers on this disc. Even the old Thelonious Monk chestnut "Round midnight" gets a far brisker workout than normal. The opening track "Rejoicin'" very much sets that standard and is an exuberant $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz, the leader spitting out a pithy trumpet solo with the section work building up the kind of Herculean crescendo that you could visualise bringing the walls of the studio down around the ears of the musicians.

The list of soloists in the orchestra consists of a roster of well-established talent such as Howard Johnson (baritone sax), Craig Handy (alto), Billy Harper (tenor) and

Stanley Cowell. The latter shares piano duties with the very impressive Robert Glasper, one of the most exciting prospects amongst the latest generation of jazz musicians. Cecil McBee (bass) and Victor Lewis (drums) complete the stellar rhythm section. The latter's superlative groove and prominent role in the overall sound of the band is an essential ingredient to the ensemble. Tolliver's son, Chad, solos on guitar on the riotous "Suspicion."

Sometimes Big Bands are unable to capture the excitement of the live performance in the studio and things can sound a bit clinical after excessive editing. "With Love" is exactly the kind of record that reminds you that there is still plenty of mileage in the jazz mainstream and demonstrative that it can be possible to be totally faithful to the band's appearance in concert. Unreservedly recommended.

(Review by Ian Thumwood)



JOHN SURMAN - THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

Label: ECM

Release Date: May 2007

Tracklist: Moonlighter; You Never Know; Wayfarers All; Now and Again; Winter Wish; The Spaces in Between; Now See!; Mimosa; Hubbub; Where Fortune Smiles; Leaving the Harrow

Personnel: John Surman : soprano and baritone sax, bass clarinet; Chris Laurence: bass; The Trans4mation String Quartet (Rita Manning, Patrick Kiernan: violin; Bill Hawkes: viola; Nick Cooper: cello)

I surprised myself somewhat by picking this as one of my discs of the year; I was expecting to like it, but not quite this much. In a way, I think it's a purely personal thing – it's not the sort of album that's going to become a universally acknowledged work of great jazz, of the Kind of Blue/Love Supreme type. In other words, it's not the sort of thing that everyone admires even if it's not a personal favourite – but it does strike a personal chord with me, and that's why it's on this list. In particular, it exemplifies something I like about Surman's output as a whole: the way that his explorations of texture, types of melody, and mood are drawn on a specifically English tradition, which at times (such as in his orchestral and choral works), puts him in the mystical/pastoral tradition of the likes of Vaughan Williams. It's a quality that's hard to pin down exactly – something to do with a brooding, melancholic darkness at its centre, at times turning into folksy nostalgia, at others romantic wistfulness. It concerns itself with the abstract, but remains rooted in the concrete – it can be very pretty, but there's always a certain beefiness to it.

Fitting this into the context of his career as a whole, Surman's taken the virtuosity of American jazz (where would the bass clarinet be in jazz without Dolphy's example?), and developed a muscular/wistfully-tender approach that has served him well, from early

jazz-rock days (including a crucial appearance on John McLaughlin's 'Extrapolation') to the more spacious, almost ambient recordings he's made on ECM for the last thirty years or so. At times this new approach grew a bit wearing, especially during the 1980s when he tended to solo over synthesizer loops – there was a sense that he really needed other musicians to prompt him away from noodling. Consequently, some of his best work has been in collaboration with drummer Jack deJohnette. In the 90s, he diversified, moving into classical composition, and appearing in all manner of contexts.

For his latest, it is the classical approach he turns to once again: this is the 'sequel' to 'Coruscating', which is, unbelievably, almost a decade-old (it was released in 1999). The only other jazz instrumentalist is bassist Chris Laurence, whose role is primarily melodic, and the absence of a drummer creates a very different rhythmic feel to your usual jazz record, with the Trans4mation String Quartet (assembled from scratch especially for the earlier project) bringing out the wonderful, rich textures of Surman's compositions.

In fact, several of these compositions are adaptations of earlier pieces from different stages in Surman's career: 'Moonlighter' began as an exercise piece for a Royal Schools of Music Course in Britain; 'Where Fortune Smiles' was the title-track of a classic 1970 jazz-rock record; and 'Mimosa' was written for oud-player Anouar Brahem – and, though it doesn't feel at all out-of-place, it does depart from the more 'English' feel of the rest of the album (interestingly, while at London University, Surman studied sitar at the School of Oriental Studies).

Surman's sensitive string-writing (none of the blanket wash heard on so many jazz 'with strings' album) also has its roots in his little-known earlier musical experiences: in addition to the large arsenal of reed instruments that he currently employs, he once played double-bass, even appearing in an orchestra under the conduction of Vladimir Ashkenazy on one occasion in the 60s. In fact, it turns out that the centre-piece title track of the album doesn't even feature Surman at all – it's a composition for solo violin which, he says, develops the way that he would play the instrument if he could. He continues the story: "It's really become a central part of the structure of the whole, an arching piece that binds the two halves of the album together. I'd sent the piece to Rita [Manning], with a little trepidation, about a year ago. She's been working away at it since then, and plays it fantastically."

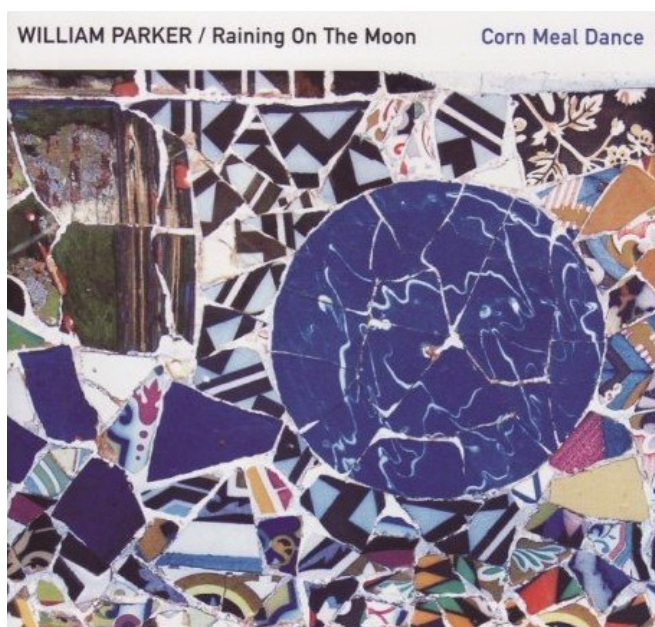
Such a process illustrates the confidence Surman has in the players, and the way the project has matured during the long gestation period between albums. In his own words, once again: "the music has been developed simply through playing: we've played together a lot now, and as we've progressed the string quartet has become much more integrated into the improvisational process too. The project has become looser in performance than it was when we started out, and it also feels much more like a *band*, a complete entity. I've learned that there are many more possibilities than I first imagined, and gained more confidence both in what I can write for the strings and in what I can leave to the players' imaginations." Thus, at the end of 'Now and Again,' the strings have complete freedom, yet manage the transition in such a way that its hard to tell where composition ends and improvisation begins. This is obviously not music of the complexity and sheer intellectual rigour of Braxton's Iridium box-set, the year's other major jazz/classical fusion (although Roscoe Mitchell's 'Composition/Improvisation Nos. 1, 2 & 3', also on ECM, should not go unnoticed), but it aims for a different kind of

effect, and one that many listeners will undoubtedly find more palatable than that of the Professor.

Of all the instruments he plays, it's his baritone that's most prominent, and most effective, perfectly meshing with the rich strings on the darkly romantic, almost *noir*-esque 'Moonlighter.' He turns it into a vehicle for the expression a piquant yearning, very different from the gruff elegance of Gerry Mulligan, though like Mulligan he succeeds in turning what can sound unwieldy, clumsy into something mellifluous, liquid, malleable.

Surman has honed everything to perfection: his playing style, (with its characteristic, slightly skewed, off-balance, surging melodic tilts), his compositions and arrangements. It's perhaps a summation of some sort, and, even if not quite that, it's the work of a superb musicians working at the very height of his powers and maturity, making music with the benefit of a wealth of experience and wisdom behind it, gathered from playing with the top British and international jazz musicians in a variety of contexts over decades, but also a young man's fresh outlook, an ability to be sharp and probing, to see into those spaces in between that others can't (between genres, etc).

If I had one criticism, it would be the inevitable ECM one - that it's too samey, too one-mood. Despite occasional more upbeat, faster tracks, a whole hour of this sort of meditation is necessarily going to become slightly soporific – even more so as, typically, the album was recorded in a resonant acoustic interior (the Austrian St Gerold monastery), and given the usual 'Eicher' touch. Still, I feel this far less than I do with many other ECM albums, and it really has given something unique, something more than any other jazz release this year.



WILLIAM PARKER AND RAINING ON THE MOON – CORN MEAL DANCE

Label: AUM Fidelity

Release Date: October 2007

Tracklist: Doctor Yesterday; Tutsi Orphans; Poem for June Jordan; Soledad; Corn Meal Dance; Land Song; Prayer; Old Tears; Gilmore's Hat.

Personnel: William Parker: bass; Rob Brown: alto saxophone; Lewis Barnes: trumpet; Eri Yamamoto: piano; Leena Conquest: voice; Hamid Drake: drums.

Additional Information: Listen to an audio stream of the full album at AUM Fidelity's website (www.aumfidelity.com)

Parker (see feature on Downtown Music) has of course played with all the great free jazz musicians, but this is about as far from the likes of Brotzmann or Cecil Taylor as you can get. A more relevant comparison would, in fact, be Wynton Marsalis' much more hyped vocal suite 'From the Plantation to the Penitentiary.' In contrast to that work's rather bitter tone (Marsalis once again railing against everything that he has a problem with in modern society), Parker's work has a much more optimistic bent, focusing on

pleas for, and visions of, peace –although it's by no means merely escapist and head-in-the-clouds, with accounts of injustice (Land Song, Tutsi Orphans) and radicalism (Soledad), and a homage to social activist and poet June Jordan. Nevertheless, it's the peace and love vibe that makes its present felt the most, and the 'naïve' style of many of Parker's self-penned lyrics (it would be more accurate to call them poems) can become somewhat cloying.

James Taylor, in his review for New York's *All About Jazz* magazine, writes of a "very real and true socio-political sense of urgency—not just some metaphorical impressionism", but, to my mind, it's that 'metaphorical impressionism' that tends to win through. The lyrics are structured around largely Christian references (the holy spirit, God), with occasional nods to other cultures (a juju stick, the final track, about angering the rain god and having to do a rain dance) - pretty much the de-facto spiritual reference for free jazz musicians from Coltrane to Ayler and Pharoah Sanders: a somewhat wishy-washy and vague (it could be said) peace-and-love hippy/religious sentiment (but nevertheless one that remains relevant in these, as in all times).

The music has an appropriate, matching solemnity, which threatens to fall into the stodginess of Mary Maria's late collaborations with Albert Ayler ('Music is the Healing Force of the Universe'), but without that music's disturbing intensity. Instead, a certain earnest, well-meaning blandness that creeps through, on 'Poem for June Jordan' in particular (a duet for just vocals and piano) which has little of the adventurousness in spirit or intent that I value so much in jazz.

All that said, the melodies Parker writes are simple and attractive, often buoyant and hummable, and the blues element brought in by the (intriguingly enough) Japanese, and female pianist Eri Yanamoto, gives it a nice solid grounding. Highlights include the unbearably happy yet sad melody of the title track, and the album's masterstroke, 'Tutsi Orpahns', with its subtle allusions to Beethoven's great humanistic Ode to Joy in the opening bass line and Chinese-sounding opening melody. This is also the best example of words and music fusing, rather than cancelling each other out: the lines "I am your brother/Please do not cut my throat" have an affecting directness. Reflecting the poem, the piece is divided into two sections: this opening plea, and then a lovely shift to a solemn, soaring song about a 'black angel' - perhaps the orphans' dream of redemption before they die.

It doesn't break any new ground, and it's probably not going to be remembered as one of Parker's best, but it is the sort of thing that'll be nice to spin on the CD player once in a while, and it has enough distinctiveness about it to lift it above the pack.



EVAN PARKER/MATTHEW SHIPP – *ABBEY ROAD DUOS*

Label: Treader

Release Date: September 2007

Tracklist: Tenor suite i-iv; Soprano suite i-iv.

Personnel: Evan Parker: tenor and soprano sax;
Matthew Shipp: piano

Treader is a small, modest label run by John Coxon and Ashley Wales of electronic/improv duo Spring Heel Jack: their aesthetic seems aptly reflected by the minimalist design of their website, and of the CDs themselves, which contain no liner notes, just the simple recording details, and come in delicate, plain cardboard boxes (albeit with elaborately embossed animal designs by Frauke Stegmann on the front – this one a shiny gold lizard). This is the label's third series of three releases, and the only one on which Coxon and Wales do not feature. Some might say that's a relief, as their tendency towards a slightly less 'pure' improvised aesthetic to that of the older generation musicians they play with can lead to such misjudgements as the new-agey soundscapes accompanying master Danish alto player John Tchicai on 'John Tchicai with Strings.'

Whatever you think about SHJ, they are to be congratulated for bringing these two musicians together – not the sort of duo you'd that readily imagine, the British avant-gardist, committed to one hundred percent to free improvisation, and the more jazz-based Shipp, who's experimented with hip-hop and electronica in his work, as well as thundering out mighty left-hand chords under the solemn massiveness of David S. Ware's 'godspelised' tenor sax. As it turns out, they really do strike up a rewarding musical relationship, and their playing has a lot in common. It's easy to forget that Parker began by playing jazz, and he taps into that stream again here in a way that he doesn't normally do, while retaining his uncompromising and absolute fidelity to in-the-moment interaction and discovery.

The territory covered is often abstract and fragile. Some could say that this is the result of edginess – a cagey first encounter – but I think it's more deliberate than that. Both are being put in a situation that's slightly different to what they do most of the time, and thus create an entirely new approach (albeit one so subtle it doesn't feel as radical as it may be). They create open environments with lots of space, offering room for the other player to join in, to accentuate, to echo, to contrast: music where feeling and thought are often one and the same – sober and studied but full of emotion.

'Soprano Suite Part iii' finds Parker focussing on little quiet sounds, on flutey, breathy sonorities, and Shipp spending most of the piece simply repeating an arpeggio. It has an important lesson - that improvisation doesn't have to mean jamming, showing off virtuosically, as it seems to in pop music, where the solo is a spot for the musician to showcase their ability first, and a chance to contribute to the integrity of the composed song second (that's my interpretation anyway; I may be wrong) - it can be a legitimate form of music in itself, and, more perhaps than any other form of music, in the right hands, lead to a focussing in, an intense inner focus, an inscape at once personal and with something to say to whoever wants to listen.

Elsewhere, 'Part iv' of the suite shows how Parker's playing has an intensely physical quality to it (something Ben Watson has commented on in his writing on improv) – the best way I can think of to describe his playing here is 'quack-claps.' Behind him (or alongside him, it would be more accurate to say), Shipp maintains a delicate balance between high and low, light and dark, left hand and right hand – a careful gradation of shading, like that of a master visual artist.

Their interaction is beautifully judged - Shipp'll play a phrase, then Parker'll come in after a bar or two with a skittering variant, before waiting, a natural pause built

into his soloing style that adds tension and reaction and expectation and release. It's perhaps best illustrated by the final piece on the album, a very short track with Parker's watery John Butcherisms again skittering away, and then everything ending as if cut-off in mid-flow. The suddenness of this cessation caught me by surprise, and at first I was disappointed that there wasn't more – but if you look at it another way, after the startled realisation that it's over you realise that, yes, Parker's actually resolved the last phrase he played beautifully. The inner logic of his improvisations is profound in a way that can only have resulted from years of experience.

There are those who criticise free improv for not being engaged enough: for being detached, abstract, unconnected, unemotional. Parker and Shipp's music may be abstract, but once you listen to it in the right frame of mind you realise that good free improv is some of the most engaged music there is, and is REALLY based on emotion as well as thought. I'm not trying to urge a prescriptive 'way of listening to free improv', as this will clearly vary from listener to listener, and may vary according to what mood the listener is in - I know that sometimes I'll get a lot more out of it because I'm in the right frame of mind for it. That's not a criticism of the music, that's a criticism of me. All the information and rewarding experience is there in the music for you to take out, but you have to make the effort – as someone (I think it was guitarist John Russell) commented, there is a need for virtuoso listening as well as playing. You have to share the concentration and focus that goes into making the music, to focus with extreme intensity.

In an age where music is increasingly just another commodity, offering us scantily/provocatively clad women who are, let's face it, major pop stars because of their looks rather than because of the quality of their voices - in such an age, free improv is a major force in encouraging a greater respect for music and music-making, and of ways of turning LISTENING into a far more rewarding experience.



**PETER BRÖTZMANN/ PAAL
NILSSEN-LOVE/ MATS
GUSTAFSSON – *THE FAT IS
GONE***

Label: Smalltown Superjazz

Release Date: November 2007

Tracklist: Bullets Through Rain; Colours in Action; The Fat is Gone

Personnel: Peter Brötzmann: alto and tenor sax, bass clarinet; Mats Gustafsson: baritone sax, flutophone (flute with sax embouchure); Paal Nilssen-Love: drums

Additional Information: Recorded live in concert, July 20th 2006, at Reknes, Norway, as part of the Molde Jazz Festival.

A live trio recording from 2006, this CD has as much power as Brötz's tentet release, 'Guts'; if anything, it is even more aggressive, primally forceful in its impact, although, like the other recording, it has its melancholy and hushed moments. The title seems to imply exhaustion, a loss of the meaty power of Brötzmann's 70s heyday (he's not getting any younger), but that impression is soon dispelled by the music itself, which shows that he's still most definitely got it, and, what's more, has also got a fine

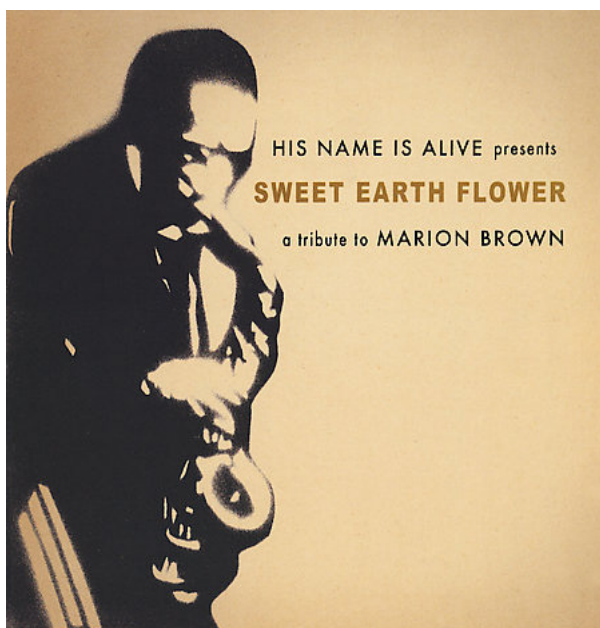
partner in Mats Gustaffson, one of the younger generation of free improvisers, and a heavily Brötz-influenced sax player with a similar big-lunged, gruff and tough approach to his instruments. I find Gustaffson somewhat less engaging in other contexts, such as his band 'The Thing' (see review), but here, the two reedsmen inspire each other to much more compelling lung-busting displays and moments of fractured calm. It begins like a horse shooting out of the blocks, or 'Bullets Through Rain', as the track title puts it. Perhaps horse isn't really the right metaphor to use – it's more like a roaring, charging lion let loose in the race, perhaps devouring the other animals as they frantically try to escape... At just under 10 minutes, it's the shortest track, and keeps up the intensity pretty much throughout, with the two repeating memorable melodic phrases at each other like Sanders and Coltrane on 'meditations', driving up and up before simply letting go and screaming to the rafters. It's far from mere noisemaking, though – despite the feel of utter abandon, there's always a sense of purpose too. The music builds to climaxes, making the exhilaration when they come even more potent; these men are masters at creating structure out of nothing, sound of silence, and music out of all these things.

Recently, it's sometimes felt that Brötz (like Evan Parker with his circular-breathing solo soprano sax trick, which he's done to death now), has been settling into, if not something of a groove (for that would imply coasting, and Brötz's total commitment is never, has never been in doubt), something of a pattern at least – perhaps even formula. Here, though, such thoughts are brushed from the mind, as he and Gustafsson really spark off each other, provoke themselves into going places they had perhaps not intended, stretch things out, cut things short, find new sonorities. They play a variety of different instruments, including Gustaffson's 'fluatphone' (a flute with a sax mouthpiece); Gustafsson's rough-hewn baritone finds its sonic parallel in Brötzmann's tenor, which has always struck me as rather baritone-like, in its really powerful low-register sound – few players have that mightiness, apart from perhaps David S. Ware. Brötz on his own has always been a pretty ferocious prospect – he must be the loudest player on the scene – and the three musicians make enough noise for many more. At times, the volume is such that it can generate a feeling of overwhelming, almost orchestral impact – yet one must not overlook the fact that a lot of the music here is quite subtle. For instance, at the beginning of 'Colours in Action', Gustaffson and B opt for a more languorous development, unfolding through tentative baritone and bass clarinet – it's as if overlapping conversations are being attempted, stopped and started mid-way, sometimes leading to awkward pauses, silences: proddings and pokings into the dark, before exploding into the white-heat-light of jubilatory Aylerian freedom. Another example: about eight minutes into the title track, the band move into a gravity of feeling that almost recalls the rubato ballads of mid-60s Coltrane.

As Charles Farrell writes in his review for the website emusic.com (from where the album can be downloaded), "*The Fat Is Gone* is really about voices. All three musicians (but especially Brötzmann) speak through their instruments. This impulse to vocalize subsumes matters of technique and linearity. The music doesn't "go" anywhere; it exists moment to moment, snarling and biting." Farrell believes that such an approach, which could be characterised as 'pure' free jazz, is becoming increasingly absent in the jazz scene today, due to the multiplicity of different influences working on the music: people are more likely to include hip-hop elements, à la Matthew Shipp, or funk, or rock, or world music, than this in-the-moment, high-intensity approach, with all the risks that

being in the moment brings with it. In fact, I think his emphasis is a bit off the mark: free music applies across the genres – Brötzmann’s ‘Machine Gun’ is often cited as ‘punk before punk existed’, etc. Gustaffson plays with rock bands, with Thurston Moore, etc, and Moore praises him for his openness : “Mats is the most modern of players where the genre tags of jazz, noise, experimental, avant-whatever are finally transcended to a new millennium – where compositional concepts are at once in check with open improvisation and a supermodernism what we always wanted: rock & roll”.

Farrell: “The album closes with a strange and moving fluttering of saxophone keys and brushed drumming, ending in unpretty beauty.” A lovely phrase, and though there are moments in the set where conventional beauty is approached, let’s face it, you don’t come to a Brötzmann album to be serenaded to sleep – you come to be pushed to the edged, dragged along with the musicians, to look over the precipice and maybe jump straight in, an experience with its only healing power (catharsis?), its own engagement of the emotions, and eventually, you realise, its own beauty.



HIS NAME IS ALIVE – *SWEET EARTH FLOWER*

Label: High Two Recordings

Release Date: November 2007

Tracklist: Sweet Earth Flying; Juba Lee; Capricorn Moon (live); November Cotton Flower; Bismillahi 'Rahmani 'Rahim; Geechee Recollections (I); Geechee Recollections (II); Sweet Earth Flying (live).

Personnel: Warn Defever: guitar, piano; Michael Herbst: alto saxophone; Elliot Bergman: tenor saxophone, Fender Rhodes piano; Justin Walter: trumpet; Erik Hall: Wurlitzer organ; Jamie Saltsman: double bass; Dan Piccolo: drums, percussion; Olman Piedra: congas, cajon drums; Jamie Easter: percussion.

Additional Information: Available at emusic.com. Live tracks recorded November 2004 at University of Michigan Museum of Art.

“Ornette Coleman is the same as Charlie Parker, but he did it a different, the opposite way. Charlie Parker did everything that he did based on knowing harmony and chords. Ornette Coleman did everything he did based on knowing how to reach inside of himself and create music intuitively.”--Marion Brown, 2003 in an interview with Fred Jung on allaboutjazz.com

Though John Coltrane is the well-established hero in Brown’s descriptive pairing of the quintessential bop saxophonist and the original avant-garde innovator, Brown himself, along with other sax players like Archie Shepp or Dewey Redman, have also brought vital blends of chordal improvisation and borderless imagination to jazz. Almost unanimously described as over-looked or under-sung, Marion Brown was an inside member of the mid-60s NYC vanguard jazz movement recording alongside and inspiring/drawing inspiration from Coltrane, Coleman and Shepp. In fact, after relocating from Atlanta to New York in 1965, his very first recording session was for Coltrane’s now legendary *Ascension*, which is often pinpointed as the moment the celebrated

saxophonist emerged as the avant-garde spiritual leader. The other two saxophonists Coltrane brought in to help inspire his own sound in new, fresh directions, Shepp and Pharoah Sanders, went on to well-revered careers, but Brown, though he recorded a number of respected albums over the last forty years (nonetheless for the likes of Impulse!, ESP, ECM, Fontana, Freedom and Black Lion), has remained thoroughly under the radar. Would I have ever imagined Warn Defever's genre-defying indie-pop outfit His Name is Alive to be the group to pay proper respects to Brown? No, but Defever is an underappreciated musician and composer in his own right, so perhaps it is only proper.

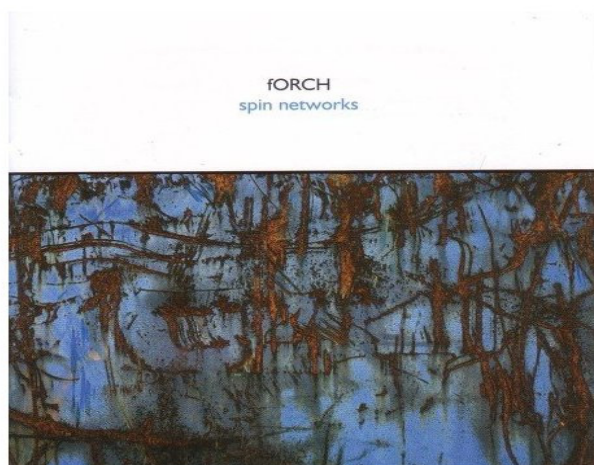
For the last seventeen years, Defever has been experimenting with His Name is Alive's dream-pop sound, from the found sound and tape loop obsessed 1990-debut *Livonia* to last September's *Xmmer*, in which the band explores a myriad of styles from Afro-pop to folk that shimmer with pristine production. No matter his stylistic interest of the moment, Defever's music in any of its concoctions is underpinned by the experimental and spiritual aesthetic established by Brown's mid-60s jazz scene. Music should never be paint-by-numbers or intently confined to a specific genre's framework to express an idea; it should be the artist's expression of feeling regardless of predetermined principles, melodic, atonal or otherwise. Maybe Defever is inspired by Brown's particular idiom in the same way Coltrane was back in '65 and set out to use this vernacular to push his own musical expression in new directions. Or perhaps he is just a fan who wanted to bring attention to the overlooked saxophonist. Either way, *Sweet Earth Flower* is one of the most inspired and interesting albums I have heard all year.

Originally intended as a one-off concert at the University of Michigan Art Museum to pay tribute to Brown, the success of the evening sparked follow-up recording sessions from the talented ensemble. Including members of NOMO and Antibalas, this concoction of His Name is Alive pulls songs from both Brown's initial mid-60s period including cuts from 1965's *Marion Brown Quartet* on ESP and 1966's *Juba-Lee* on Fontana along with his mid-70s reemergence on Impulse! after relocating to Europe, including '73's *Geechee Recollections*, '74's *Sweet Earth Flying* and '75's *Vista*. Three of the eight tracks are from the original concert, while the other five tracks include two studio renditions of the live tracks and three other interpretations from the nine-piece band.

The music is that of delicately toned, almost ambient-leaning non-linear jazz. The players mesh seamlessly: Defever's guitar work rarely takes spotlight (nor does any instrument really), restraining instead to a barrage of differently approached ostinatos or hypnotic chords; Defever, Elliot Bergman and Erik Hall's electric and acoustic keys paint lush, detailed and poignant images with their sensual melodic improvisations; tenor saxophonist Bergman, trumpeter Justin Walter and alto saxophonist Michael Herbst accentuate and solo with subtlety, driving each track with modality akin to the more reflective and melodic moments between Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry; double bassist Jamie Satslman acts as a strong anchor helping retain rhythmic structure whenever the other players sidestep to the outside; and percussionists Jamie Easter, Dan Piccolo and Olman Piedra jump from more pulsing rhythms to ambient hand-percussion accentuation with ease, tying elements of free jazz, African and Latin music into one vibe. Their recreation of Brown's sound is that of spiritual reflection, sensual exploration and earthy provocation. It shimmers and drones, rouses and soothes. It's meditative music you can get lost in without ever actually feeling lost, and that may be the best compliment I can pay it.

Marion Brown is still alive and gave his blessing to Defever to pursue this project. Due to his deteriorating health, Brown spends most of his time now teaching, and not advance classes in the detailed improvisation he is most known for, but mostly to children and amateur musicians on the art of musical self-exploration, instrument creation and the innate boundary-less nature of music. As *Sweet Earth Flower* displays, Brown doesn't just teach in the classroom; his recorded output inspires and influences similar-minded artists like Defever to produce music just as warm, cerebral and passionate. It's avant-garde jazz where the soulfulness is not lost in the intention to explore the outside. It's music roaming free, where melodicism is not sacrificed for the sake of being different or avant-garde, but rather expressed in its unabashed warm spirit. Like the opening quote, both Brown and Defever reach inside and create music intuitively; they are well schooled in the technicalities of jazz, but express music based on feelings alone.

(Review by Michael Ardaiolo; originally published at the audiversity.com blog (<http://audiversity.com/2007/11/his-name-is-alive-sweet-earth-flower.html>))



fORCH – SPIN NETWORKS

Label: psi

Release Date: August 2007

Tracklist: fOKT III; Volume; Temperature; Solution G; Nekton; Plankton; Solution H; Pressure; fOKT II.

Personnel: Furt (Richard Barret and Paul Obermayer): electronics; John Butcher: soprano and tenor saxophones; Rhodri Davies: Celtic and concert harps; Paul Lovens: percussion; Phil Minton: voice; Wolfgang Mitterer: prepared piano and electronics; Ute Wassermann: voice.

For this double-album on Evan Parker's psi label, recorded at the 2005 New Jazz Meeting of the South West German Radio (SWR), Richard Barrett and Paul Obermayer's electronic improvising duo fURT was expanded into an electro-acoustic octet, fORCH. The additional musicians included saxophonist John Butcher and vocalist Ute Wassermann, whose extraordinary range of extended techniques accounts for much of the music's impact. She is easily capable of moving from short bursts of luxurious, almost operatic lyricism, to hyperactive virtuosity, to very impolite sounding squelches, farts and burps; at all times a sound that is intensely physical- intimate, slightly disturbing, the sort of thing that might put your hairs up, but which yet manages to sound captivating rather than irritating. She moves the gamut from disgustingly invasive bodily presence to heavenly choir, seemingly at will, and when coupled with the equally exploratory Phil Minton, the effect is scintillating.

Much of the music is hushed and calm, in keeping with developments towards quiet, with a focus on sounds and textures and the properties of sound, in electrasonic music. Most notable in this respect is the second track, 'Volume', where single notes and tones predominate, and ideas are zoomed in on for a long time before slowly changing – only minutely, but in a way which can change the whole texture without you noticing it. Transitions and ideas overlap, creating a true interaction, not just the simple call and

response it would be tempting for improvisers to fall into, but something on a much deeper level (perhaps due to the compositional background of Richard Barrett). Furthermore, the unusual vocal sounds that the singers are capable of producing means that sometimes you're not sure whether the otherworldly sounds come from their mouths or from the electronics. The avant-garde singer's gurgles, grunts, orgasm noises, etc, have become clichés, but Minton and Wasserman make them new, turns their voices into instruments (see also Minton's wonderful 'Slur' on Emanem records), another, merged part of the texture. The presence of John Butcher's saxophone, with his delicate use of harmonics and high pitches, is ideal for floating into the general electronic wash.

If I have any criticisms, it's perhaps that there's too much quietude, too much meditative meshing, and a bit more ensemble fire music might have been welcome. That may be slightly unfair though – it's not all serious sound-production. On some of the tracks, the piano adds an anarchic, noisy, flavour, and there's a real sense of playfulness and humour as well, such as the brief 'duet' between female and male voice on 'Nekton', which sounds like a Clanger dueting with a drunk submerged underwater, or 'Solution G', where Wasserman (aided by electronics) manages to sound like a parrot, a bear, a zoo menagerie, cooing and roaring and growling away. At one point she simply breathes into the microphone, while behind her electronics play back her screams (sounding like a sound effect from the computer game Rollercoaster tycoon) and blip and blop away. The impression given is of bodily functions, or the sounds associated with them, gone out of control - this is not polite music! It's intensely physical, constantly reminding us of the nature of sound as human, even though it's all electronically manipulated, the human element is still central, albeit in a highly dramatised, uncontextualised way. At the end of one track, a final burst of particularly rude sounding electronic burps is followed by a male voice saying 'Excuse Me'!

Needless to say, this is music that requires the listener's full attention, otherwise it begins to sound disjointed and dull - as with much improv, you need to pay close attention to the subtle shifts in mood and texture to really appreciate it, because it's not background noise, it's the sound of a group of musicians interacting closely with each other to produce unexpected and intriguing results. It's rarely dull, frequently absorbing, and makes you rethink ideas about melody and music, and realise that sounds can be as good as any conventional (or, as Derek Bailey puts it, 'exaggerated') melodies.

I know that this particular kind of soundworld is one explored fairly frequently in electroacoustic music today, but I couldn't help thinking as I was listening that this re-invents music as it proceeds – so much that when you hear 'normal' piano notes or saxophone notes it's almost shocking that there are such things. fORCH completely turn musical language on its head, but not in an anarchic/rebellious way (the most anarchic sounding parts are often chord clusters or the like). Instead they make what they're doing a completely natural language in which to work. You come out of it with a different kind of high to when you're listening to McCoy Tyner or the like: there you feel elated, spiritually high, here you feel calmed, as if you've gone through a valuable experience which has taught you something about music and about humanity. Probably the best improv disc of 2007.



PETER EVANS - *THE PETER EVANS QUARTET*

Label: Firehouse 12

Release Date: November 2007

Tracklist: !!!; Bodies and Souls; How Long; Tag; Frank Sinatra; Iris; The 3/4 Tune

Personnel: Peter Evans: trumpet; Brandon Seabrook: guitar, electronics; Tom Blancarte: bass; Kevin Shea: drums.

Additional Information: Available at emusic.com.

New-York based trumpeter and composer Peter Evans' second recording as a leader (the solo album 'More is More' came out on psi in 2006) is perhaps more representative of his work than his debut. A good example of where the 'inside-outside' approach has come in jazz today, it's fairly eclectic in its influences and approach, but avoids being overly cluttered, or knowingly and smugly post-modern. For the most part, it's possible to feel the emotion coming through, as well as to be dazzled by the undoubted technical mastery displayed by all four musicians— though Evans' own phrase "searing, intense and honest" may lead you to expect something more heart-on-sleeve than is actually the case.

Compositionally, it's intriguing: a set of entirely original material, with themes which are spiky and vaguely reminiscent of Anthony Braxton in their astringent, highly rhythmic focus (Braxton's Iridium boxset is, after all, on the same label). Evans provides some background in his useful liner notes: "The compositions here are almost entirely made up of harmonic material lifted directly out of standards, but with many layers of melody and noise piled on top. My goal is that the familiar elements are constantly coming in and out of focus, creating loaded, pressurized music. The collective and individual improvisation on the material I've provided constitutes a second layer of tension; we are forcing our kinetic playing styles through the (usually very difficult) notation, rather than seeking a comfortable relationship with it...traditional chord structures, white noise, bebop licks, tape hiss and practice exercises are set in wild motion against each other."

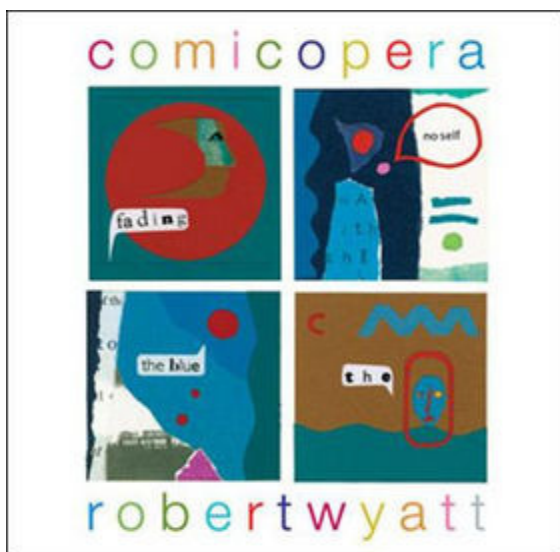
As the above quote indicates, Evans is knowledgeable, almost academic about the music he plays, displaying a serious (though not po-faced) approach akin to that of Dave Douglas, with whom he also shares certain similarities in playing style, particularly in the jagged, angular feel, and the instinctual searching for unusual and just slightly off-kilter phrases, all wrapped up within a keen structural awareness, and a sense of rigorous discipline. He is perhaps the more aggressive performer (due to his comparative youth?), and is playful with the various different generic and stylistic elements that he employs, but is careful never to let the music come anywhere near chaos or overkill.

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The sidemen may not have the leader's flare, but are also more than mere token accompanists: Brandon Seabrook's guitar and occasional electronics add a more noisy, modern touch, yet manage not to seem too incongruous alongside the elements of jazz tradition, while the drumming of Kevin Shea (who plays with Evans' in the raucous, revisionist band Mostly Other People do the Killing) is busy but not overly cluttered. Not forgetting the other member of the quartet, Tom Blancarte's bass is capable of both giving the music a firm, jazzy (but not old-fashioned) foundation, and venturing outwards during the freely improvised sections (listen to his woozy arco bass near the beginning of the second track).

A couple of tracks strike me as highlights. 'Tag' finds Evans balancing the conventional vocabulary of post-bop trumpet with touches of the avant-garde. At times his tightly controlled virtuosity recalls the joyful abandon through discipline of Coltrane's work on 'Giant Steps' – at others, he settles for some insecty, tougher interplay with the tight rhythm section, and the modern-sounding guitar adds a wilder touch, more akin to contemporary 'noise music.' 'Frank Sinatra' is the nearest thing to a ballad on the record, and finds him smearing, slurring, growling, and generally emoting all over his horn's register. Perhaps there's a touch of parody, too, but that doesn't prevent the piece from being deeply felt, even if it's hard to see exactly what either the melody, based round a repeated figure, or the solo, has to do with Sinatra – perhaps the traces of fragility, a bit of the bombast, but with a good deal of the polish scraped off. After Evans' initial trumpet statement, the guitar solo – delivered in a harsh, snappy tone that nevertheless retains the semblances, or traces of Tal Farlow jazz balladry, filtered through an abstract spiders' web of sound and silence (awkward pauses learned from Derek Bailey), which then leads into more abstruse, jangly, high-pitched group speculations and a fade into drone.

Whether, as Troy Collins puts it in his review of the album for the All About Jazz website, this album perfectly captures the zeitgeist of the times (does jazz today have a zeitgeist? Did it ever have a zeitgeist?), it's certainly evidence of what seems to be a pleasing trend in jazz, seen also in the work of pianists Lafayette Gilchrist and Matthew Shipp: serious, modern music, played without gimmickry, clever but not overly dry; thoughtful, considered, yet with freedom for the unplanned and the unexpected.



ROBERT WYATT – *COMICOPERA*

Label: Domino Records

Release Date: October 2007

Tracklist: *Act One (Lost in Noise):* Stay Tuned; Just as You Are; You You; A.W.O.L.; Anachronist.

Act Two (The Here and Now): A Beautiful Peace; Be Serious; On the Town Square; Mob Rule; A Beautiful War; Out of the Blue. *Act Three (Away with the Fairies):* Del Mondo; Cancion de Julieta; Pastafari; Fragment; Hasta Siempre Comandante.

Personnel: Robert Wyatt: voice, piano, percussion, trumpet, cornet, old metronome, keyboard, karenotron (voice of Karen Mantler), Enotron (voice of Brian Eno), pocket trumpet, monicatron (voice of Monica Vasconcelos); Brian Eno: keyboard, keyboard bass, effects; Seaming To Voice: clarinet;

Annie Whitehead: trombone, baritone horn; Yaron Stavi, Chucho Merchan: bass violin; Monica Vasconcelos: voice; Paul Weller: guitar; Gilad Atzmon: saxophones, clarinet; Jamie Johnson: bass guitar, electrical interference; David Sinclair: piano; Phil Manzanera: guitar; Del Bartle: guitar; Orphy Robinson: steel pan, vibraphone; Alfie Bengel: voice; Beverley Chadwick: baritone saxophone; Maurizio Camardi: saxophones; Alfonso Santimone: piano, keyboards; Alessandro Fedrigo: bass guitar; Paolo Vidaich: percussion; Gianni Bertonecini: drums.

Four years on from ‘Cuckooland’, and Wyatt’s latest solo album is named as record of the year by The Wire magazine. What difference have the intervening years made? It finds him assembling what is probably his largest cast to date, but he doesn’t go overboard with any of the arrangements, and it retains the intimate feel familiar from the rest of his solo output. His voice is still the main focus, and, while the man himself claims that it’s become reduced to “an old wino’s mutter,” it’s obvious from the start that this is hardly the case – and even if it is, it’s a very beguiling mutter!

This is an album that in several ways comes out of a sense of crisis, and documents Wyatt’s attempts to recover from this: most significantly, the near-breakdown of his relationship with his wife, as a result of his drinking. A song like ‘Just as You Are’, about the acceptance of your partner despite all their foibles, represents the reconciliation, and, while the lyrics seem to approach the standardized sentiment of conventional pop song territory, you know that Wyatt wouldn’t be singing them unless he had lived them, unless they were justified by personal experience: he delivers them with the utmost conviction.

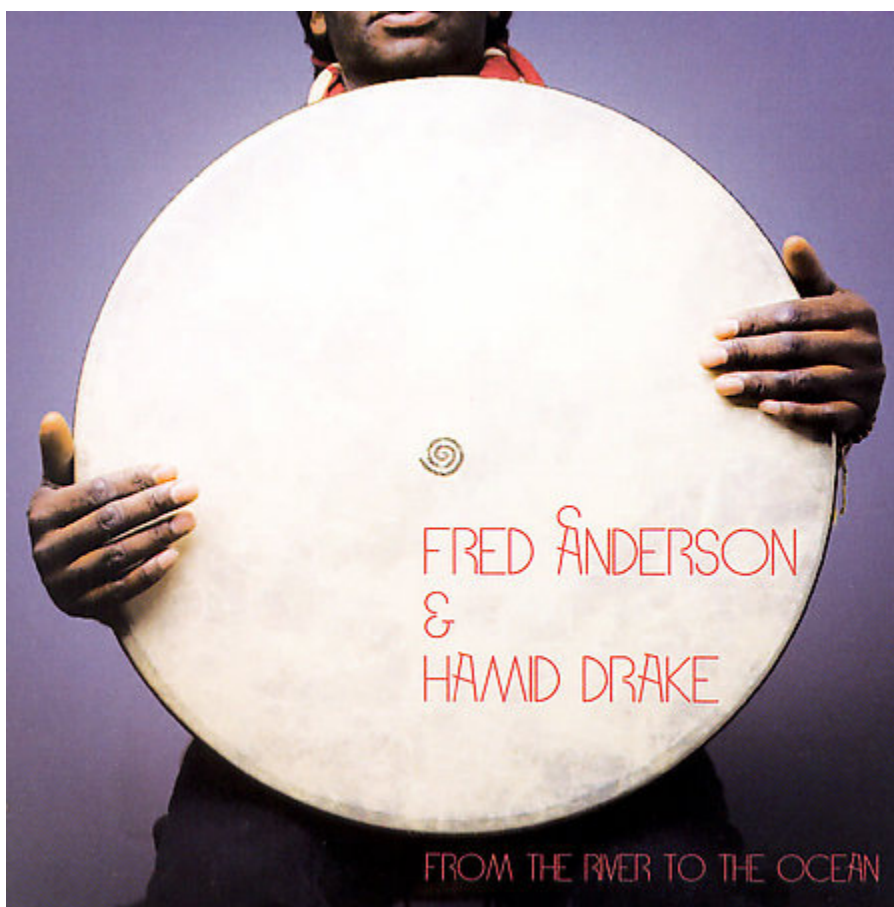
The album’s 16 tracks are divided into 3 ‘acts’, though Wyatt hasn’t actually written a bona-fide opera: these are still 3 or 4 minute pop songs. He gives a concise explanation of the album’s unusual structure in an interview with musicOMH.com: according to him, Act 1, *Lost In Noise*, “is about loss and relationships.” Act 2, *The Here And Now*, is “about things I like, don’t like, don’t understand”. Act 3, *Away With The Fairies* “is, you know what? I’m fed up with English speaking people. I’m going to go away with the fairies... It’s to do with feeling completely alienated from Anglo-American culture at that point. Just sort of being silent as an English-speaking person, because of this fucking war [in Iraq]. The last thing I sing in English is ‘you’ve planted all your everlasting hatred in my heart.’ I then wander off round the world searching for different kinds of meaning - whether it’s avant-garde, or revolution, or surrealist fantasy, or religion, or all those things. I sing in Italian and I do a bit of surrealism, free improvisation [‘Pastafari’], and end up with a romantic revolutionary song of the ‘60s, a hymn to Ché Guevara. Just to say, that’s my generation, the kind of hope that kept us going. I’m not saying it worked or didn’t, but without these little dreams and hopes, I couldn’t survive.”

A somewhat bitter thematic undercurrent, then: as Wyatt explains, the ‘comic’ in the album title doesn’t mean ‘funny’: “Greeks divided things into Comedy and Tragedy, and Comedy didn’t mean funny, it meant just, ‘about human foibles’, as opposed to tragedy which is about Gods and Destiny. So this is about human foibles.” It’s not a depressing affair, though – indeed, when Wyatt deals with his wider political concerns (albeit in an oblique way), on songs like ‘A Beautiful War’ or ‘Out of the Blue,’ it’s easy to miss the harshness and bite in the lyrics due to their meltingly wonderful melodies. This can be construed as a problem, or not, depending on your viewpoint; speaking for myself, I’ve always tended to prefer his less ambitious pieces: the love songs, the quirky nonsense-rhymes (although of course, he’s always been good at fusing the political and

the personal, as with 'Shipbuilding'). Thus, I find it easier to chime into the sentiments of 'Just as You Are', or 'A.W.O.L.', a moving song about a woman with Alzheimer's sitting in her attic, alone with "the tick and the tock of the damnable clock".

Whether, in the end, Wyatt finds transcendence, or escape, or whatever it is he's seeking, is unclear – and if he does, it's never going to be unequivocal, but complex, tinged with wistfulness and whimsy. Thus, the concluding track is a 1960s romantic song about Che Guevara: a look back to an idealized heyday, when such ideals were more commonplace, and an attempt to find solace in them, it would seem. It does lighten the mood somewhat, its mid section riding on a joyous Latin groove, but it never really feels triumphant, or indeed, conclusive. Yet I wouldn't have it any other way: Wyatt doesn't do straightforwardly 'happy' music, and there's no reason he should. Long may it continue...

OTHER CD REVIEWS (Alphabetical)



FRED ANDERSON/HAMID DRAKE – FROM THE RIVER TO THE OCEAN

Release Date: April 2007

Label: Thrill Jockey

Tracklist: Planet E; Strut Time; For Brother Thompson; From the River to the Ocean; Sakti/Shiva

Personnel: Fred Anderson: tenor saxophone; Jeff Parker: guitar (1,2,4); Harrison Bankhead: cello (2), piano (3), bass (1,4); Josh Abrams: bass (1-3), guimbiri (4,5); Hamid Drake: drums, frame drum (4).

Fred Anderson is a legendary figure, at least in Chicago - a founder member of the AACM, founder of the Velvet Lounge, and an octogenarian who's still performing at a high level of intensity. He's always been seen as an avant-garde player, but, from my experience of his music, he's far more 'straightahead' than his reputation would suggest; as one critic puts it, the most 'inside' of the 'outside' players. Nothing wrong with that, yet he does tend to meander somewhat, and I do feel that he lacks the real fire found in other free players. I know that's not what he's trying for: what he's after is more insinuating, more bluesy, muscular yet traditional, dense yet clear. I should like this approach, yet I somehow just don't get along with it. One gripe I have is that one phrase - a high note followed by a twiddling flurry of lower notes - seems to appear, in modified form, in every bar of every solo on every song that he ever plays. It's as if he's perpetually playing variations on one melody. In some this is fascinating, but it can soon become rather boring, and somewhat restrictive. Even more so than usual, I feel that there's something missing here, and the record is ultimately rather a disappointment.

The guitar sound is a major part of this - it's just too 'polite' for my tastes, though it's very competently done. But it feels curiously old-fashioned, as if Kenny Burrell was jamming with some free players, and it sits none too well in the mix. In particular, it jars with the textures created by the rhythm section switching between various exotic instruments; indeed, despite the presence of two bassists, there's only actually one track where they play together.

Harrison Bankhead shows his versatility by playing cello and some remarkably skilled piano, on 'For Brother Thompson', perhaps the best track, which opens with some Arabic chanting from a la Don Cherry, before emerging into an atmosphere very reminiscent of mid-60s Coltrane - a rubato ballad, full of pounding drums, arco bass, tremulous, deep-voiced, ominous piano and solemnly intoned tenor (though Anderson is his own man, and manages to prevent the track from becoming too derivative).

Hamid Drake has demonstrated his versatility by appearing on several very different releases this year: world music duets with William Parker, finding both on various shankucahis and what not; keeping jazz time in Parker's Raining on the Moon quintet; engaging in interplay alternately sparkling and monumental with gifted young pianist Lafayette Gilchrist on an album of that most difficult of groupings, piano and drum, duets recorded at the Vision Festival in 2006. Here, despite the joint top-billing, he tends to slip into the background - which is not necessarily a bad thing. One thing you could not accuse him of is being showy, despite his undoubted talent. When he does take a solo, it's refreshingly patient, as he builds up by playing the drums, rather than resorting to cymbal crashes (which has become something of a cliché of free jazz drumming). This desire to build from the bottom up, from bass and blues and roots to a more considered kind of free summit is admirable, but it does make the album feel at times rather too tame - one can't help wishing that they would break out just a little bit more.

(On a final, more positive note, plaudits for the exceedingly well-designed cover: I suppose you could call it minimalist, in that there's very little in the frame, and there are only three colours employed. Very striking however you define it.)

(Review by David Grundy)



**BILLY BANG QUINTET WITH
FRANK LOWE - *ABOVE AND
BEYOND: AN EVENING IN
GRAND RAPIDS***

Label: Justin Time Records

Release Date: May 2007

Tracklist: Silent Observation; Nothing But Love; Dark Silhouette; At Play In the Fields of the Lord

Personnel: Billy Bang: violin; Frank Lowe: tenor sax; Andrew Bemkey: piano; Todd Nicholson: bass

Not something that's likely to make much of a splash, or be noticed by mainstream or even specialist press, this is nonetheless a record well worth hearing, if only for its historical value. Recorded back in 2003, it sees Billy Bang continue his recent projects

exploring the music of Vietnam, and exploring his military service there in the 60s. Also in Vietnam at the time was the guest on this date, Frank Lowe, whose last recorded appearance this was. At the time of this live concert, he was playing with only one lung (he would die of cancer just five months later); as Bang explains, he got so out of breath at the end of gig that the promoter wanted to call an ambulance.

The relationship between Bang and Lowe lasted for more than twenty-five years: in their earliest collaborations, both men burned equally hot from opposite ends of the spectrum, Billy's violin soaring in lines of white-hot intensity, and Frank's tenor sax blazing with confrontational abandon. Over the years, each man moved closer to the other's approach, without diminishing the fire and energy of their shared visions.

Here, Bang's debt to swing master Stuff Smith is felt in his lightning runs, and Lowe's solos, with their occasional atonal interjections, capture the spirit of the 1960s 'New Thing,' although his style had evolved away from the fire-breathing of his youth to prettier, pithier mutterings (notably on the warm, burnished 'Nothing But Love') that perfectly complement Bang's staccato solos and rhythmically expansive melodies. But it's perhaps when the quartet comes together, whether drawing on the modal style of John Coltrane or the folk-melodic music of South Africa, that the music makes its strongest mark: the tracks are long and often luxuriant, giving the music time to breathe and develop collectively as well as to build in soloistic intensity.

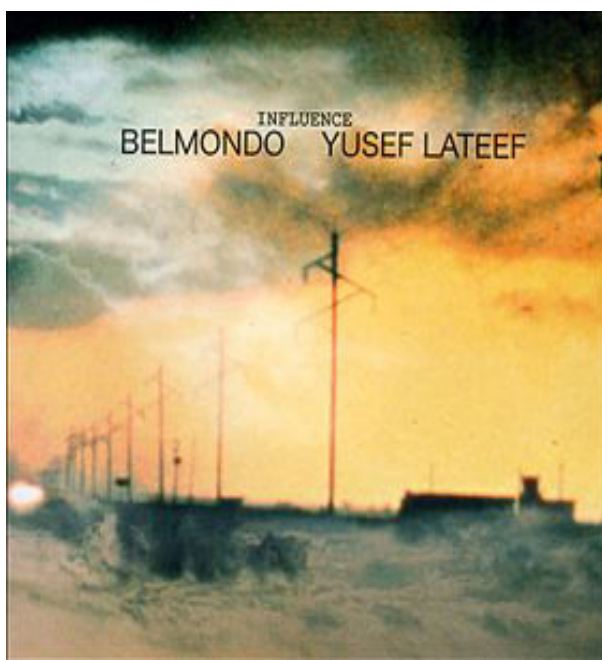
On The opening 'Silent Observation,' Lowe and Bang take a quick unison turn through the main theme before Lowe splits off to build a long solo that slowly builds in intensity, employing sounds that manage to span an almost Paul Desmond-like hush all the way to some upper register squeals. Bang is certainly Lowe's equal here, taking a solo that almost comes apart at the seams with its ferocity.

The closing 'At Play In The Fields Of The Lord' can be heard as *Silent Observation's* companion piece. With somewhat similar tempos and harmonic development, the two compositions are fine and inspiring examples of what this pair

could do, not only on that night but on their many previous collaborations.

It's 'Dark Silhouette' that's the centrepiece of this concert, though. Pianist Andrew Bemkey ratchets up the tension by beginning with a lengthy (five minutes or so) solo section that at points heads into Cecil Taylor territory. This gives way to the snakey theme layed down by bassist Todd Nicholson before Bang launches his elegant and bluesy solo. Lowe runs with that motif but soon leaps into the land of extended technique with interval jumps, more upper register righteousness, and even some textured valve clatter.

The release of this album is the result of a pact that the Bang and Lowe made when Frank was on his deathbed in September of 2003. His last wish was for Billy to make sure that this music would become available to the public, and here it is. A fitting tribute. **(Review by David Grundy)**



BELMONDO/YUSEF LATEEF - *INFLUENCE*

Label: B Flat Recordings

Release Date: April 2007

Tracklist: Shafaa; Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre reve; Apres le jeu; Influence; Orgatique; An Afternoon In Chatanooga; Suite Overtime - Part I (Morning); Suite Overtime - Part II (Metaphor); Suite Overtime - Part III (Iqbal); Suite Overtime - Part IV (Brother John); Le Jardin.

Personnel: Yusef Lateef: tenor sax, various flutes, oboe; Lionel Belmondo: tenor & soprano sax, flute, clarinet, percussion; Stephane Belmondo: trumpet, Flugelhorn, shell, percussion; Glenn Ferris: trombone on 2nd disc; Ensemble consisting of French horn, tuba and various woodwinds, piano, bass and drums.

I wonder how many jazz fans will have overlooked this recording by the then 84 year old multi-instrumentalist Yusef Lateef backed by an ensemble led directed by two French brothers who still remain pretty unknown in the UK?

Until I had the good fortune to see this group play live at the Vienne Jazz Festival last year, I too might have passed this double CD by. However, now available on this side of the Channel, this is a record for which I have unbounded enthusiasm and I would urge anyone who is a fan of the writing of the likes of Gil Evans or Mike Gibbs to seek out this offering.

Beautifully recorded, this ensemble borrows heavily from the French Impressionist composers of the early 20th Century who have had an overwhelming influence on jazz ever since the days of Bix Beiderbecke. The two discs are largely made up of arrangements of compositions by Yusef Lateef plus an adaptation of the tragic Lili Boulanger's "Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre reve" and the transformation of a theme for organ by the little known composer Charles Tournemire by arranger Christophe Dal Sasso into a piece called "Apres Le Jeu." The former is almost transformed into a blues whilst the attractive theme of the latter is one of the highlights of this recording, being

exquisitely scored for this chamber ensemble. This is not, however, to suggest that the music lacks an edge as the influence of music from the East (whether through the themes, Lateef's choice of various ethnic reed instruments or the exotic percussion) balances the classical feel of this group. It is demonstrably jazz what is being played here.

The second disc consists totally of Lateef originals starting with the mournful "Afternoon in Chatanooga." that evokes the likes of Gil Evans' work on recordings such as "The Barbara Story." Two thirds of the second disc is made up of Lateef's wonderful "Suite Overtime" with the opening "Morning" resembling those finger-snapping mid-tempo blues that the Ellington band would play in the 1950's – here the groove is laid down by Dre Pallemmaerts' drumming as opposed to Sam Woodyard. Ex-pat American Glenn Ferris lays down a fruity trombone solo. It is great to hear him playing in the context of this group and yet another example of a musician denied the recognition he deserves by the jazz audience. The influence of the Duke is again felt on "Metaphor", the oriental-sounding opening making way for the lop-sided Latin feel behind the main theme that is familiar from albums such as "Afro-Bossa." Lateef's lithe flute solo throws in a quote from Gerswhin's "Summertime" and following a solo by the bassist, Stephane Belmondo contributes a boppish trumpet outing. "Iqbal" brings the tempo down several pegs before the suite closes with an up-tempo tribute to John Coltrane that yet again recall's Gil Evans' work from the mid-1960's when the Canadian arranger started to explore modal jazz. Lionel Belmondo's soprano is given full reign on the latter composition and Ferris again coaxes multi-phonics from his horn. The whole project concludes with the Lateef composition "Le jardin" which is totally scored.

I would strongly urge that anyone who either considers Europe to be a backwater of jazz or a land where the ECM's worthy yet frequently monochrome efforts rule supreme should check out this record. Not only does it offer evidence of Dr. Yusef Lateef as a great writer in addition to the masterful soloist he has been known to be for over fifty years, but it illustrates that in the Belmondo brothers and arranger Christophe Del Sasso, France have musicians of world class stature. This gets my vote as perhaps the best new jazz CD of 2007.

(Review by Ian Thumwood)

HAN BENNINK'S YEAR IN MUSIC: 2007

By David Grundy



Han Bennink was a busy man last year. At the age of 65, he showed no sign of stopping – if anything, he's got even more manic and furiously active in his playing. He appears on the following 2007 releases (see next page), in a large variety of different contexts, displaying both his adaptability, enormous energy (both in his playing and the amount of different projects he plays on), and also his ability to retain an individuality that means he really couldn't be anyone else.

The Blueprint Project with Han Bennink - *People I like*;
 Daniele D'Agaro Adriatics Orchestra – *Comeglians*;
 Ammü Quartett - *Self-titled*;
 Terrie Ex/Bennink - *Zeng!* (guitar/drum duo);
 Mohammed 'Jimmy' Mohammed - *Takkabel!*

This individuality is partly due to his stage shenanigans, such as playing only a cymbal for an entire concert, throwing a cymbal out onto stage to announce his entrance behind Arthur Doyle, playing a drum set made of cheese, and playing his kit (and the floor) with a large broom. As the biography on his official website puts it, “His first percussion instrument was a kitchen chair. Later his father, an orchestra percussionist, supplied him with a more conventional outfit, but Han never lost his taste for coaxing sounds from unlikely objects he finds backstage at concerts. He is still very fond of playing chairs.”

His sculptures, like his playing, show an anarchic, sometimes crude sense of humour, combined with a serious artistic intent. Like his frequent collaborator Peter Brotzmann, he makes music that’s hard-driving, aggressive, and profoundly liberating, perhaps (and it’s an over-used word), cathartic – but he is capable of being subtle as well, not just the macho posturer that some critics would make him out to be.

And so it seems an appropriate time to have a look at a couple of his albums, old and new, which illustrate all the virtues described above....

BENNINK: THEN AND NOW

By Seth Watter

Han Bennink: virtuoso drummer, Euro-jazz legend and (sometimes) madman. Looking at his discography, it becomes apparent that the Amsterdam-born percussionist has performed far too seldom as a leader. Perhaps it’s typical to look at an artist in terms of his first and last works, but in Bennink’s case those two recordings happen to be two of his best and, ironically, two of his hardest to find. Without further ado, it is my pleasure to present *Nerve Beats* and *Amplified Trio*.

HAN BENNINK – NERVE BEATS



Label: Atavistic

Release Date: September 2000

Tracklist: Bumble Rumble; Spooky Drums; Nerve Beats.

Personnel: Han Bennink: drums, rhythm machine, tablas, percussion, trombone, clarinet, voice, miscellaneous other instruments!

Additional Information: Recorded live at Rathaus, Bremen, Germany on September 27, 1973; originally released 1973.

Nerve Beats was unearthed by Atavistic in 2000 as part of their Unheard Music series and is Han Bennink’s first extant solo recording. Recorded in 1973 for Germany’s

Radio Bremen, it comes from the same era as Peter Brötzmann's *Live in Berlin '71*: a quartet date on which Bennink, at certain points during that historic concert, revealed himself to be a chameleon with a massive setup composed not only of drums but of exotic percussive and wind instruments, along with what the liner notes could only describe as tins and home-made junk. Two years later, Bennink was still exploring these eclectic rhythmic forms that had their roots in the musics of India and Africa, adapting them to the spirit of free music as it was being created by a group of audacious pan-European youngsters. Many have commented on Bennink's ability to play quite freely as well as within the confines of tradition, straddling jazz's old school and its vanguard with equal conviction. "Bumble Rumble" attests to this, with its fluid, militaristic drum rolls interlocking with Bennink's whistling to create an anthemic overture, telling the audience to make way for the emperor's arrival. At three minutes, it's concise, engaging, and entirely unlike what is to follow on the two lengthy tracks that make up the bulk of the concert.

That said, "Spooky Drums" is pure cacophony. Amid a wave of cymbal crashes and furious tom rolls, Bennink spits out volcanic gibberish to his audience's delight. The growls, howls and spluttering outbursts weave in and out of his rhythms, beginning at the point where the other ends and vice versa. When Bennink picks up a trombone or a clarinet, or one of the other odd items he inevitably has lying around onstage, he plays them with outrageous multiphonic effects, sounding like a Tuvan throat singer crying from the belly of a brass prison. And when he mixes the delicate sound of musical pipes with the thundering punctuations of his drumkit, it sounds like the most natural thing in the world. It is no exaggeration to say that "Spooky Drums" pushes jazz's rhythmic possibilities to their absolute limit. This is the sound of a man becoming his drum. We're exhausted from the sheer physicality of it all, but by the time we reach the climactic series of wonderfully muffled snare hits and tittering cymbals, we're only ten minutes inside the beast! There is yet to follow Bennink's experiments with pre-recorded orchestral music, drum machines, marimbas, tablas, music boxes, and whatever else is in reach.

The pre-programmed loops that introduce "Nerve Beats" may lead unsuspecting listeners to assume that this is a leftover from the concurrent German electronic/new wave scene. But the dissonant clarinet that hovers throughout the mix makes it obvious that we're in a very different realm, somewhere between Stockhausen, free jazz, and multi-idiomatic world music. His cymbals ring like alarm clocks, his trombone like Martian war calls. If "Spooky Drums" is an epic journey, "Nerve Beats" is a cartoon soundtrack. Who is this man who plays 5,000 instruments and then deems it appropriate to scream at the top of his lungs? Is he angry or joyful?

The audience's nervous laughter at each of Bennink's outbursts suggests that they may have asked themselves similar questions. Indeed, this isn't the pure rage of Brötzmann's *Machine Gun*; anyone who listens to that album knows what kind of emotions lie behind it. *Machine Gun* was a collective call to revolt. *Nerve Beats*, on the other hand, is a defiantly individualistic approach to improvised music that is all the richer for its humour. The only thing of stability is Bennink's distinctive roar: a scream which, every time it appears, draws the entirety of its universe into a black hole from which it emerges purified once more.

HAN BENNINK – *AMPLIFIED TRIO*



Label: Treader

Release Date: July 2007

Tracklist: At 1; At 2; At 3; At 4; At 5; At 6; At 7

Personnel: Han Bennink: drums, percussion; John Coxon: electric guitar; Ashley Wales: electronics.

Additional Information: Recorded live in South London on January 21, 2006. Part of 'Series 3' of releases on the Treader label – the other albums are 'Abbey Road Duos' by Evan Parker/Matthew Shipp and 'Brooklyn Duos' by John Coxon/Wadada Leo Smith. They can be purchased from the Treader website: <http://www.treader.org/>.

A whirlwind of percussion, acid-fried guitar, electronics that sound like an animal in its death throes – Bennink's *Amplified Trio* comes out the door with both fists swinging. Matched with the duo behind *Spring Heel Jack* – guitarist John Coxon and sound artist Ashley Wales – the veteran improviser pushes new territory with this striking mixture of free jazz and electronics. The release places itself in an exciting new trend within free music that has its forebears in Trio x 3's *New Jazz Meeting Baden-Baden* (Hat, 2003) and the Muhal Abrams/Roscoe Mitchell/George Lewis album *Streaming* (Pi, 2006). Okay, so perhaps it's not so radical – Don Cherry, George Lewis, and Freddie Hubbard were doing this kind of thing years ago. But the electro-acoustic idiom has moved beyond the experiments of a few eccentrics to become the playground of many eccentrics. Recorded live in South London on January 21, 2006, *Amplified Trio* is notable for abandoning the delicacy of these prior endeavors in favor of sheer volume, taking the new hybrid form a step backward into the world of an ESP blowout.

What I find so remarkable about groups like this is the way that each instrument blends into its peers, no matter how disparate they are in sound. *Amplified Trio* has it a bit easier, since Coxon's distorted guitar isn't too far from Wales' array of electronic manipulations. The first of these seven untitled tracks is the longest and most brutal – even its quietest moments are filled with abrasive and unsettling overtones. After fifteen minutes of dense improvisation, the band hits something akin to a stride with oscillating tones that provide the backbeat for the spiraling fury of the drums and guitar. Bennink sounds fantastic as usual, moving across a variety of rhythmic styles with grace and ease; Coxon provides plenty of squall with his energetic fusion of Jimi Hendrix and Derek Bailey; and Wales is particularly crucial with his subtle loops and washes of sound. Oddly enough, the first track ends with the noise of the ocean, suggesting that what lies beneath is a substructure both placid and filled with the tumult of undulating waves.

The rest of *Amplified Trio* is understandably more subdued. The third track even finds Bennink abandoning his drumset in favor of ratchety, *guiro*-like percussion, interacting with Wales' electronic stutters and butchered vocal samples. The three create a music that is unpredictable, yet deliberate and logical in its own way; in these moments, the trio comes closer to a piece by Francois Bayle or Walter Ruttman than anything related to jazz. Bennink, however, can't help but swing – and his restless drumming soon leads the group back into the white heat of free improvisation. Bennink's early work experimented with electronic looping as early as 1973's *Nerve Beats*, and one can hear its

seeds coming to fruition on *Amplified Trio*. One can also hear his sound being transferred to Wales' sonic collages and Coxon's feedback-drenched excursions, imbued as they are with a vocal quality: a desperate scream that has always made itself felt in the drummer's career.

"At 4" is more in line with Spring Heel Jack's oeuvre, all ambient drones and elliptical guitar scrapes barely bubbling across the surface. Bennink shatters the calm with a well-placed cymbal crash, each subsequent hit of the kit taking on the quality of an eruption. The three improvisers crackle and spit fire at every turn. John Coxon sounds alternately like fireworks and a broken carburetor, Wales swaps Nintendo belches for twittering sine waves and orchestral excerpts. The two adroitly follow their leader, that Dutch maverick whose muscular beats propel the session into such brilliant territory. Even the two-minute "At 6" is as bewitching and beguiling as anything else on the album, refusing cohesion amid a stream of marching beats, guitar grime and knotty clarinet samples. In this realm beyond syntax, Bennink's rhythms tap into a language that speaks but does not inform, that calls without regard for its listener, that doubles back on its own communicative poverty. *Amplified Trio* is the beauty of a voice arrested mid-flight. Let's stop and take a look at that one again.

(Review by Seth Watter. More of Seth's writing can be found at his blog, 'Meshes of the Afternoon' – <http://meshes.blogspot.com>)



TERENCE BLANCHARD - A TALE OF GOD'S WILL (A REQUIEM FOR KATRINA)

Label: Blue Note

Release Date: August 2007

Tracklist: Ghosts of Congo Square; Levees; Wading Through ; Ashé; In Time of Need; Ghost of Betsy; The Water; Mantra Intro; Mantra; Over There; Ghost of 1927; Funeral Dirge; Dear Mom

Personnel: Terence Blanchard: trumpet; Brice Winston: tenor and soprano saxophones; Aaron Parks: piano; Derrick Hodge: acoustic and electric basses; Zach Harmon: tabla and the happy apple; The Northwest Sinfonia, conducted by Terence Blanchard; Simon James: contractor and concertmaster

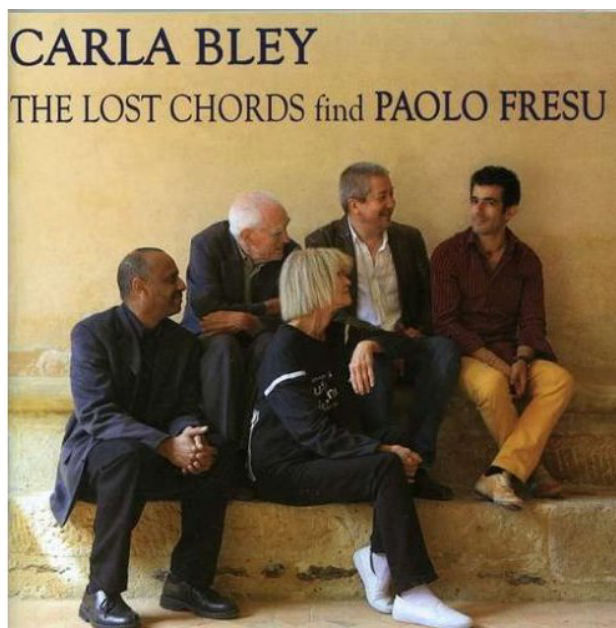
Emerging along with Wynton Marsalis and Donald Harrison as one of the 'Young Lions' of 80s New Orleans jazz, Terence Blanchard has since developed into a mature trumpeter and composer. His latest release, *A Tale of God's Will*, is the product of his long-standing relationship with filmmaker Spike Lee: all of the music contained is either part of or associated with the soundtrack to Lee's 2006 HBO documentary *When The Levees Broke*. The members of Blanchard's quintet contribute significantly to proceedings, both in terms of composition and performance, and the group is often supported by Blanchard's rich string arrangements played by The Northwest Sinfonia.

In keeping with Lee's film, the personal experiences of the disaster as well as references to New Orleans' musical past provide an important basis for the album. The music itself tends towards dark, dramatic palettes, although there are a few brighter

interludes – drummer Kendrick Scott’s extended piece “Mantra” with Blanchard’s passionate yet elegant solos stands out in particular. The use of Indian tablas may strike some as incongruous, on an album that seeks to stress African roots (“Ghosts of Congo Square”), but this is a very minor quibble, and ends up being only a problem conceptually. In fact, the tablas add a much needed rhythmic propulsion to the music, thus preventing it from becoming too stodgy in its sombreness.

While the album lacks a certain amount of coherence owing to its origins as a film score and although a few sections, particularly the string arrangements, sound rather produced, it is nevertheless a compelling film score which will probably appeal to soundtrack fans just as much, if not more so, than jazz fans.

(Review by Noa Corcoran-Tadd)



CARLA BLEY - *THE LOST CHORDS FIND PAOLO FRESU*

Label: ECM

Release Date: October 2007

Track listing: One Banana; Two Banana; Three Banana; Four; Five Banana; One Banana More; Liver of Life; Death of Superman/Dream Sequence #1--Flying; Ad Infinitum.

Personnel: Paolo Fresu: trumpet, flugelhorn; Andy Sheppard: soprano and tenor saxophones; Carla Bley: piano; Steve Swallow: bass guitar; Billy Drummond: drums

This album finds Carla Bley in more intimate mode than her more familiar big band music, working with this very fine small group (their previous release, simply titled ‘The Lost Chords’, is well worth investigating), to which is added the Italian trumpeter Paolo Fresu. He’s not really known outside of Italy (though he does play with the Italian Instabile Orchestra), so his contribution is a pleasant discovery. It may come as something of a surprise that he was Andy Sheppard’s choice for the project – Bley asked him to name someone he would like to play with, and he mentioned Fresu. It was probably something of a surprise to the other musicians as well – Bley apparently respects Sheppard’s taste so much that she invited Fresu along without even having heard his playing.

So the music itself. Despite the jokey track titles (one banana...two banana....three banana...four....five banana....one banana more - geddit?) and liner notes (some of the most refreshing and entertaining I’ve read for a while actually - humour is a lost art in the jazz world, it sometimes seems - although they don’t really tell you anything about the music) this isn’t about in-your-face exuberance. Instead it’s thoughtful, though by no means soporific jazz - well played, perhaps lacking that killer spark that characterises Bley’s best works, but a very solid record. Andy Sheppard plays some excellent stuff

(reminding people of what a good player he can be, when he's not noodling around in world-fusion mode with Joanna MacGregor - work that shows off the best sides of neither artist); Fresu is attractive; Drummond unobtrusive; and Swallow a model of elegance and subdued romanticism.

There's often a sense of natural climax - the music rises and falls very smoothly, building up to moments of greater passion by a process of slow-burn, rather than taking a short cut straight to the fire. Thus, when the players do stretch out a little more, it feels pleasingly intense (more intense than it actually is, in all probability). Overall, though, the thing you're most likely to remember is a pleasing vein of something that I wouldn't quite call melancholy: perhaps thoughtfulness would be a better word (though 'Four' has a somewhat funereal, mournful feel, with Bley's minor chords ascending and descending under Fresu's trumpet solo).

Bley's compositions and piano-playing are so subdued that they could be criticised as almost dry - there seems to be a deliberate avoidance of emotion, leaving it up to the horn players to provide a bit more of a spark. The biggest influence seems to be a *film-noir* feel, although classical music plays a part as well: the short 'One banana more' carries an apparent echo of Pachelbel's famous 'Canon' in its melodic line.

'Death of a Superman' is, in fact, the first movement in a suite Bley was commissioned to write in memory of actor Christopher Reeve (who, of course, played that famous character in a number of films during the 70s and 80s). The suite was never completed, but this excerpt stands out as probably one of the best tracks on the record. It begins with Swallow's gentle solo, using a technique he's developed over the past thirty years or so, whereby he plays the electric bass as if it were a classical guitar: firmly in the upper register of the instrument, a beautiful plucked sound. Underpinning this are Bley's piano chords which echo Satie's Gymnopodies in their atmosphere of languorous, luxurious inscrutability - sensuous but cold, if that isn't too much of a paradox. Fresu's muted trumpet shows a heavy Miles Davis influence, as one might expect - in particular, he employs a little upward sweeping phrase that he is very similar to something Miles used to play - but he clearly has his own style. A particular endearing trick is his employment of a little tongued, repeated phrase - almost march-like, with a bouncing, jumping feel, it gives his solos a bit of a lift, and prevents them from descending too far into the navel-gazing that Tomasz Stanko fell into on his 'Suspended Night' album a few years back.

Finally, for a bit of contrast, the last track, 'Ad infinitum', sees Shepherd gets to let rip a bit (though the mood never really rises above boiling temperature), before riding a groove until the end.

So, then: this is quite considered music. The players don't play flurries of notes - they pick and choose them with care - and it manages to steer a steady course between being overly cerebral and overly introverted and pretty. Fair to say, I think, that's it's one of those mellow, 'chilling-with-a-glass-of-wine' records - but that's not implying any disrespect. It's warm and pleasant, fits round your ears like a glove, won't frighten the horses, but is by no means devoid of inspiration or adventure. Not as soporific as I feel a lot of ECM can get, and likely to give you a feeling of warm satisfaction after listening to it. Recommended. **(Review by David Grundy)**

PAUL BLEY - *SOLO IN MONDSEE***Label:** ECM**Release Date:** August 2007**Tracklist:** Mondsee Variations I-X**Personnel:** Paul Bley: piano

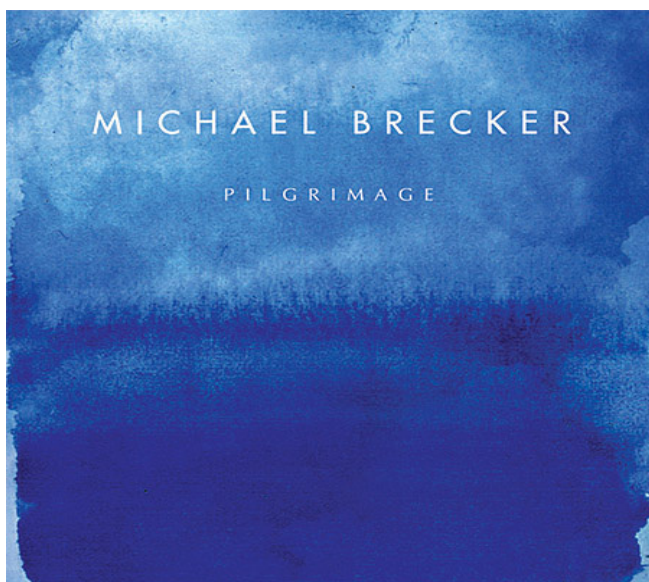
Onto another released by a piano-playing Bley on ECM – this time, Paul, who was, of course, at one time romantically attached to Carla. Since then, though, they’ve gone their separate ways, romantically and musically. Released in time for his 75th birthday, in Autumn 2007, this is only his second solo album on ECM, and can thus be seen as something of a sequel to 1972’s classic ‘Open to Love.’ In the interim, of course, he’s become known as a superb solo improviser, releasing albums on other labels, but this release obviously has a special historical resonance about it. During his career, I can’t help thinking that he’s been rather an underappreciated musician – someone you know is there, and you know is good, but who never receives that much attention from the jazz public or press. Critics are most likely to describe him for who he’s played with – Mingus, and, most famously, Ornette Coleman (whose music is pretty damn hard to fit into on a piano) – than for his achievements as a leader, and this album didn’t make that much of a fanfare. A shame, really, as it’s a very good piece of work.

No less a personage than Nat Henthoff wrote that “Bley is a genius”, and went on to describe how to interweaves beauty and intellect in a way that “few pianists in any form of music” can. Producer Manfred Eicher shares the same respect, and here records

him on the same piano, and in the same location as he had recorded András Schiff playing Schubert fantasies – on a Bösendorfer Imperial Grand in Mondsee, Austria.

That respect, and that trust, has clearly paid off. This is music that's uncertain, and malleable, with constant subtle changes of mood (every few bars, even), but without ever feeling disjointed (you may not even notice the changes, unless you're listening very carefully). Always, though, there's a feel of song about it: Bley frequently sounds like has some well-remembered standard on the tip of his tongue - or, rather, his fingers. At several moments, I thought he would burst into (well, slide into) Surrey in the Fringe of Top. At other times, he sounds like he's spinning his own, new standards, with similarly wonderful melodies – take the start of 'Variation VI', where he moves from a dark feel to rhapsodic murmurings.

The song-like element is something he shares with Keith Jarrett (in the latter's solo work at least) – here, one feels, the over-used description 'lyrical' can really be justified – but he retains more of a jazzy feel. Characteristic, slightly skewy upwards runs give it an edge that Jarrett perhaps lacks, and make it a really rounded piece of music. That's encapsulated in 'Variation V', which, for me, is the highlight of the record: it's one of the shorter pieces, but it encapsulates everything that's so good about Bley's playing here. A mixture of straight jazz balladry and a more introspective explorativeness – yes, that is one of Bley's great achievements, but there is something more, something that makes this an album really worth hearing. What is this extra element? The possession of the melodic sense of a great songwriter at the same time as the talents and quick responsiveness of a master improviser – that is Bley's special gift, and that gift is in abundance here. A superb record. **(Review by David Grundy)**



MICHAEL BRECKER - *PILGRIMAGE*

Label: Blue Note

Release Date: May 2007

Tracklist: The Mean Time; Five Months from Midnight; Anagram; Tumbleweed; When Can I Kiss You Again?; Cardinal Rule; Half Moon Lane; Loose Threads; Pilgrimage

Personnel: Michael Brecker: tenor sax, EWI; Pat Metheny: guitars; Herbie Hancock: piano (1, 5, 6, 9); Brad Mehldau: piano (2-4, 6, 7); John Patitucci: bass; Jack deJohnette: drums

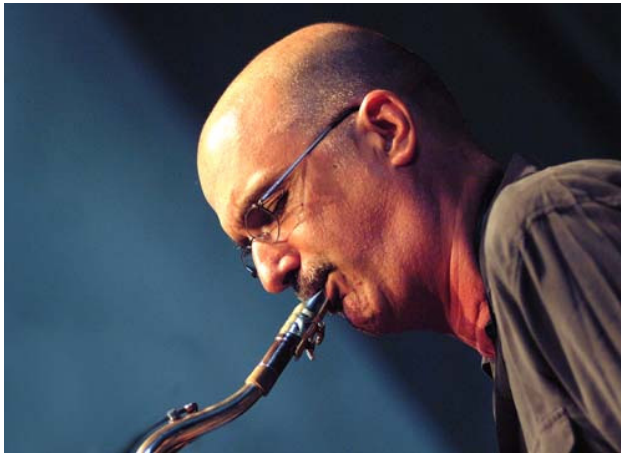
Additional Information: Brecker's final album, released posthumously.

It is difficult writing a review of what represents the late, great Michael Brecker's final recording without being hagiographical. Without doubt the most influential tenor saxophonist of his generation, over the last dozen or so years he produced a body of consistent releases that helped to define the state of play with contemporary jazz.

“Pilgrimage” is no exception. Performing live, he was always one of the biggest and most consistent features on the festival draw.

Even in normal circumstances, this would be a remarkable record. Given the fact that Brecker was seriously ill when he entered the recording studio to make this disc, this represents a super human achievement, a testament of his astonishing will. Everything that one has grown accustomed to in his playing is present, the wonderful tone, the technical fluency and, of course, the ability to swing. On top of this, there is a fire in his playing and an intensity that will have fans clambering to acquire this disc. “Pilgrimage” includes some of the most passionate playing that Mike Brecker put down on record.

As ever, Brecker has surrounded himself with the very finest musicians. The rhythm section is about as “state of the art” as is possible with Patitucci and DeJohnette acquitting themselves in as exemplary fashion as would be expected. Piano duties are shared between Herbie Hancock and Brad Mehldau, the latter playing with a degree of muscularity often absent on his own recordings. As someone with a particular interest in jazz piano, “Pilgrimage” yet again offers further evidence of the fact that Hancock is the group pianist nonpareil, prompting the soloists with judiciously selected voicings and then spooling out wonderfully creative solos. I even like his electric piano on the title track. The front line is shared with guitarist Pat Metheny, re-uniting the partnership from “Tales from the Hudson”, one of the most exceptional recordings from the 1990’s. This guitar / tenor saxophone pairing is a particularly rewarding combination and sparring with the guitar seems to particularly suit the saxophonist. Nice to hear Metheny let his hair down and really start to wail!



Getting on to the music, it is perhaps worth noting that Mike Brecker wrote all the compositions and credit is due to his ability to put together some wonderful themes. Without doubt, the one track that will get most airplay will be the rollicking “Tumbleweed” which has one of those truly infectious melodies that are so difficult to get out of your head. You feel like punching the air in celebration after the final chord when everyone has previously been jamming away on the closing

vamp. As with his fellow musicians Pat Metheny and Herbie Hancock, part of the genius of Michael Brecker is his ability to take complex ideas with time signatures and harmony and mould them into something that has immediate universal appeal. The mournful “Half Moon Lane” is no less worthy of praise and the ballad “When can I kiss you again?” is a gem.

In conclusion, this record is very much a celebration of Michael Brecker and his music. It is fitting that his final recording should be amongst some of his biggest musical friends – this record is an amicable reunion with everyone playing to their fullest ability for their buddy. Modern Jazz doesn’t get much better than this. So long, Mike. Thanks for all the great music! **(Review by Ian Thumwood)**

PETER BROTZMANN – GUTS

Release Date: 2007

Label: Okka Disc

Tracklist: Guts; Rising Spirits.

Personnel: Joe McPhee: Trumpet, Alto/Tenor Sax; Peter Brötzmann - Alto/Tenor Sax, Clarinet Tarogato; Kent Kessler - Double Bass; Michael Zerang - Drums

Additional Information: Recorded by Malachi Ritscher at the Empty Bottle, Chicago, 3rd August 2005 (Ritscher's last recording before his suicide).

'Guts' is part of the series of new Brötzmann releases put out this year by Okkadisk. The group that recorded 'Tales Out of Time' (Hat, 2002) – Brötzmann, Joe McPhee, Kent Kessler, and Michael Zerang, all extracted from Brötzmann's Chicago Tentet – is back with a new set of tunes recorded live in 2005 at Chicago's Empty Bottle. It's dedicated to the memory of sound engineer Malachi Ritscher (1954-2006), who described Brötzmann's performance thus: "Subtlety, intelligence and generosity, yet for all of that it has balls."

It's an apt description, of course, perhaps with a nod to the classic trio LP 'Balls' (FMP, 1970). Brötzmann's style of playing hasn't changed that much in four decades, but the sound of his ensemble has. Michael Zerang and Kent Kessler provide far more coherent rhythmic lines for the saxophonist than the insanity of Bennink. Judging by his collaborations with Hamid Drake and William Parker in their Die Like a Dog Quartet, Brötzmann seems to prefer an element of groove to his music these days. The first, titular track opens with an amazing Zerang drum solo before Kessler's bass and the twin tenors of Brötzmann and McPhee kick in. Brötzmann emerges to take the first solo with his repetitive, honking style, still fresh after all these years. He's overtaken by McPhee at a critical moment, whose own solo evolves from crisp to throaty in tone, as if the man is screaming through his horn. At times the two duet in unaccompanied, interlocking lines: one gruff and abrasive, the other lyrical with extended tones -- a formula familiar from 'Tales Out of Time'. The two continue to mimic each other's phrases, spiraling into the air to the beat of Zerang's Drake-like playing, always searching but still anchored in the funky drops of his wooden block and cowbell. The piece's conclusion recalls the good old days, as Herr Brötz hits the highest and lowest points on his main axe, bringing everything around him to a screeching halt.

"Rising Spirits" is double the length of "Guts" and a bit more exploratory. It begins with delicately bowed notes from Kessler's double bass and Brötzmann in the background on tarogato (a Hungarian instrument similar to a clarinet), recreating the sound of a string instrument with incredible conviction. It's a bizarre, alienating effect to get things rolling with, but it keeps the music from feeling formulaic. We then have a duet where Brötzmann's alto begins to mimic McPhee's trumpet until the two have fully explored their altissimo range. The emphasis is really on the horns; it would be great to see Kessler and Zerang take more risks rather than just provide the rhythmic groundwork, but it does take a strong personality to stand up to these powerful reeds. It's a less coherent performance than "Guts" and ultimately less satisfying, though it does have its sublime moments, like the return of the major motifs from McPhee's "Stone Poem No. 1" off of Tales; the two swell together forcefully above Kessler's bowed bass and Zerang's cymbals. It's amazing the way that the two lead soloists wind their way around each other

with almost telepathic accuracy; I never realized how remarkably similar they'd become as players until I listened to this record.

At this point, 'Guts' isn't exactly a new direction in Brötzmann's career. But it shows him still hitting his stride, aided by McPhee's more melancholy approach to songwriting. And though it lacks the cartoonish, absurdist commentary from the mid-70s peanut gallery of Van Hove and Bennink, it compensates with monster grooves and the closest thing to a Brötzmann ballad. Fine stuff, and worth the price of admission for the title track alone. **(Review by Seth Watter)**



LUCIO CAPECE/AXEL DÖRNER/ROBIN HAYWARD – *KAMMERLAM*

Label: Azul Discografica

Release Date: March 2007

Tracklist: 3 untitled tracks, with lengths of 8:16, 23:24 and 16:59.

Personnel: Lucio Capece: soprano sax, bass clarinet; Axel Dörner: trumpet; Robin Hayward: tuba

Berlin improvisers Dörner (trumpet) and Hayward (tuba) were joined by Argentinian reedsman Lucio Capece in 2004 to form the trio known as Kammerlärm (chambernoise). This is their first full-length release, culled from two recording sessions at Dörner's home in 2005 (why has it taken so long to come out on CD?). It's very much in the vein of 'reductionism', or, as Dan Warburton puts it in his review of the album for Paris Transatlantic, 'next-to-nothingism' – extremely quiet free improvisation, concerned with sound and texture rather than melody or linear development (musical narrative), and with the relation of sound to silence as much as with the sound itself. The aim (as with most good improv) seems to be an attempt to create some sort of mental/intellectual/physical state impossible to attain any other way (excerpt, perhaps, through meditation) – somewhere in between full consciousness and sleep.

Quite a daring area of music then, and full of possibilities – yet, a few years on from the beginning of this style of, in the 1990s, one may validly question whether any progression has really been made from the original concept. Indeed, one could question whether what started out as uniquely exploratory music now actually counts as 'exploration' at all.

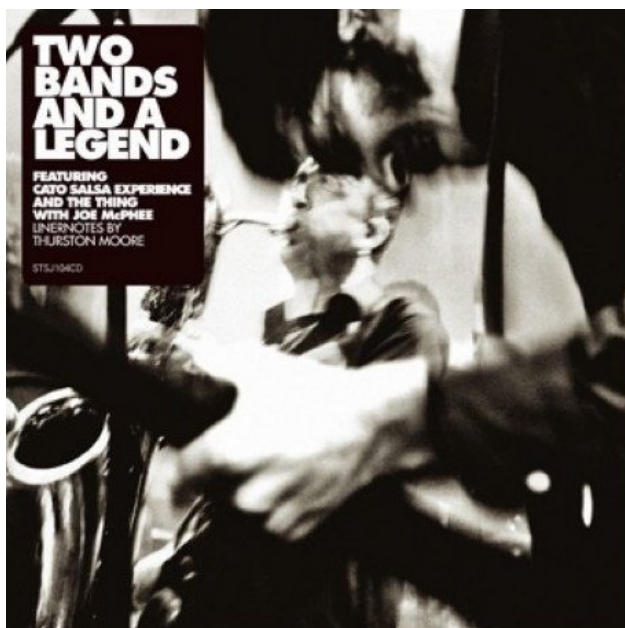
So where does this leave us? How are to we relate to 'Kammerlärm'? As the official album description puts it, the music "evinces a strict reserve with respect to 'self-expression' " – no possibility of emotion there, then – "an acute awareness of the materiality of their instruments" – interesting conceptually, at least – and "a sustained exploration of the possibilities of instrumental playing." The latter's certainly true, but it again brings us back to that question – where does this leave us, what does this leave us with? Let's take one example: Dörner's extended techniques, ranging from grainy multiphonics to valve clicks and pops, pitchless hisses and draughty glissandi. These can be very effective – yet, more often than not, when used as the sole means of performance

(not that Dorner can't do other modes – he's an extremely fine jazz player), they can leave one completely cold, as with Dorner's solo album simply titled 'Trumpet', where, for about half the record, he seems to be impersonating an aeroplane taking off.

A recent editorial for 'The Wire' magazine made me think about these issues again in relation to the music of saxophonist John Butcher, another improviser whose musical vocabulary is very much built on the use of extended techniques. As this editorial put it, the listener reaches a breakthrough when they realise that the techniques *are* the music, that they are not some external mode of virtuoso decoration imposed onto the meat of the music itself, but that they are where the musical itself argument unfolds. Butcher himself points out that you wouldn't listen to Jimi Hendrix or Aboriginal music with this separation between technique/form and content – no such distinction is made between the musical effect and the emotional effect it produces.

This is all very well, and it does help a great deal in the case of Butcher. But that is only one case, and it's not possible to argue, I think, that extended techniques in themselves have any inherent value. Without effect, they're nothing – and this record, for me, does not have the effect that Butcher's do. I can see how it would be *interesting*, but it doesn't make me *feel* – and I just can't get around that obstacle.

(Review by David Grundy)



CATO SALSA EXPERIENCE & THE THING WITH JOE MCPHEE – TWO BANDS AND A LEGEND

Label: Smalltown Superjazz

Release Date: April 2007

Tracklist: Who the Fuck; The Witch; Too Much Fun; Tekla Loo; Louie Louie; You Ain't Gonna Know Me 'Cos You Think You Know Me; The Nut; Baby Talk; I Can't Find My Mind

Personnel: Joe McPhee: tenor saxophone, pocket trumpet, vocals/ Cato Salsa Experience -- Cato Thomassen: guitar, vocals; Bard Enerstad: guitar, organ, theremin, vocals; Christian Engfelt: bass, vocals; Jon Magne Riise: drums/ The Thing -- Mats Gustafsson: tenor & baritone saxophone, electronics; Ingebrigt Haker Flaten: double bass, electronics; Paal Nilssen-Love: drums

Additional Information: This line-up has also recorded two EPs for Smalltown Superjazz: 'Sounds Like a Sandwich', from 2006, and 'I See You Baby' (recorded at the same sessions as the album under review). All are available for download at emusic.com.

The meeting between Mats Gustafsson's free jazz group The Thing and garage rock band Cato Salsa Experience began at a concert during the Kongsberg Jazzfestival in Norway in 2004, and has continued through a number of releases: a couple of EPs, the first released in 2006, and another, featuring additional material recorded at the sessions for this album, in 2007.

Thurston Moore's liner-notes, dated from the moment they were written (like Ralph J. Gleason's perhaps more insightful ones to 'Bitches' Brew,' or some minor-

league wannabe beat poet), are written in some kind of stoned/slacker/experimentalist 'hip' lingo. They're actually pretty fun, at the same time as being totally ridiculous, and I can't resist the temptation to quote from them here: "Is this superjazz? Does The Thing want to rock the fuck out? Is Paale Nilssen a love machine? Do Cato & Bård rip the shit outta guitar? Are you cramped? Can you find yr mind? Can you shake yr ass? Is it Nation Time!?" (Nation Time being the title of one of McPhee's free jazz albums from the 70s).

It feels somewhat superficial – sticking two fingers up in the air, a rather simplistic rebellion ethos, where, if we can make the loudest noise possible, we're making some great statement. McPhee knows that there's more to the music than this, so does Gustafsson, so, surely, does Thurston – but they're all happy to go along with the ride.

Digression. About six month ago, Marcus O' Dair's article on 'death jazz', in the Guardian newspaper, lumped together various different styles and acts indiscriminately – from Weasel Walter to Japan's Soil and Pimp Sessions, Acoustic Ladyland, Led Bib, Gutbucket and David Keenan of Tight Meat (for more on his performance with Sonny Simmons, see the gig reviews). O' Dair was trying to create the idea of a music which melded the attitudes of punk and free jazz, creating the new 'death jazz.' That both have broadly similar ethos is nothing new, although the means of execution were very different (compare the music of Cecil Taylor to the Sex Pistols and you'll see what I mean – one attains a 'primitive' energy through greater musical simplicity, the other through extreme musical complexity). Yet the blanket 'Death Jazz' term overlooks fundamental differences between some of these music: while some of these bands may pretend to have the same attitude as free jazzers, in fact, their fault is the same as that which they accuse rock bands of having: pretending to be extreme when you're not really, and having a simplistic understanding of the music. For instance, Death Qunt's Craig Scott blasts rock music as being "advertised as extreme when it's the most commercialised horrible nonsense with nothing rebellious about it whatsoever." I'd argue that this turns out to be a criticism of 'death jazz' too.

Some of it (Acoustic Ladyland especially) actually seems aimed more towards a no. 1 single than to any kind of real 'underground' – just as a faint jazz sheen adds some sense of sophistication to pop musicians like Katie Melua, which is helpful as a marketing tool, so the 'death jazz' market adds a daredevil edge to make jazz people seem 'in with the kids', and makes people who like rock music think they like jazz. Weasel Walter says, "My music is very personal and not geared towards mass acceptance in any way," and I'd concur, but for others, it's not the case.

And so, back to this particular record. How does it fit into the 'death jazz' category? Well, it's a pretty obvious attempt to meld rock with jazz, both in terms of material – a cover of PJ Harvey sits alongside a cover of James Blood Ulmer – and instrumentation and style (rock band plays with free jazz group). To some extent, this fusion is sanctioned by the presence of Mats Gustafsson (whose superb album with Peter Brotzmann is included in this magazine's discs of the year list) and veteran reedsman Joe McPhee. McPhee is two things which are not often present in this 'death jazz' scene (a strange thing considering the origins of the music in a music associated very much with the civil rights struggle and radical politics in the 1960s): black and American. Furthermore, he clearly possesses a wicked sense of humour, which really sparks off with these Scandinavians – you can see this even more clearly on their EP, recorded at the

same sessions, which mixes a tribute to Don Ayler with a cover of Groove Armada's 'I See You Baby' – McPhee intoning the lyrics with relish.

Opener 'Who the Fuck' is a fairly straight cover of the PJ Harvey song. I can't say I was too keen on the lead vocals, which sound like they were recorded from a distance, or through some sort of filter, or something. Fairly unremarkable – they don't really take Harvey's tune anywhere. 'The Witch' opens with a squeaky bass solo before settling for a heavy riff and some double-horn skronk. After the brief (and fun) 'Too Much Fun' comes 'Tekla Loo', the most successful track, which opens with McPhee reciting a poem, before a groove kicks in and everything then descends into noisy guitar/sax chaos. This really manages to merge the collective energies of free jazz and rock music, as the whole record attempts to do, well.

But too often, the two strands, though fairly successful in their own right, don't really sit together – it feels more like straight rock with freaky improvised interludes, or, if you prefer, improvised free jazz book-ended by straight rock melodies and changes. For instance, 'Louie Louie' feels like two different songs sandwiched together ('Sounds like a Sandwich' was the title of this group's EP, and seems appropriate): the rock song section, with vocals supported by punchy saxes, is good, and so is the improv section (lungbusting Gustaffson sax with McPhee on trumpet), but they just don't gel together.

The following track, 'You Ain't Gonna Know Me Cos You Think You Know Me,' is a surprise – a gentle jazz ballad, with Gustafsson blowing breathily over acoustic bass, joined by the drummer and McPhee's gentle counterpoint on trumpet, then some slightly surreal wailing high vocals and guitars. Out of context, it wouldn't seem remarkable – perhaps even pedestrian (and the vocals don't really do it for me)– but it's a useful point of respite from all the noise.

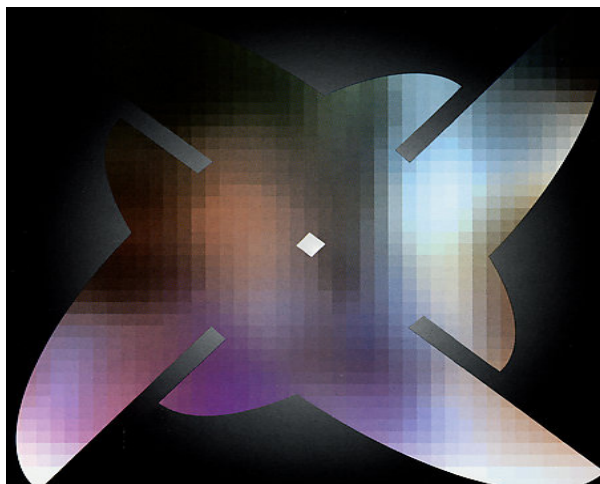
As if to make up for the momentary dip in energy, 'The Nut' is brutal – the first two minutes are a repeated (unison) guitar and drum pattern overlaid with distorted, smeary organ. When Gustafsson's baritone comes in, he briefly plays a knotty tune, leaves it to McPhee to solo with just the drums, then joins him so that they can wail together, and then he takes a solo with his Brotzmanesque-tone and vocalized sound.

'Baby Talk' is a James Blood Ulmer tune, originally performed by the Music Revelation Ensemble (David Murray, Amin Ali, and Ronald Shannon Jackson) on their 1980 album 'No Wave,' an early example of an attempt to fuse jazz with punk. Those were heavy cats, but their version sounds almost tame in comparison; this group give it another noisy workout that is at once both rollicking and somewhat distressed, with strident horns, crashing drums, and incessantly busy guitars.

Like track 2, 'I Can't Find my Mind' opens with a solo, this time guitar, full of feedback and distortion, a fuzzy sonic haze out of which a few shards of what could be said to resemble melodic phrases pop out occasionally; after a few minutes of this, another of those heavy basslines comes in, with the beefy horn sound, and vocals. It's a song by punk band The Cramps, and consists of a series of ridiculously straight blues chords, played out slowly, dragged out, grinding – presumably meant to be some kind of showstopping finish, I find it rather irritating, but some may find it compelling: a kind of doomy feel, ending with a cry.

And that is my experience of The Thing, with Cato Salsa Experience and Joe McPhee. Successful in some parts, but more often than not a somewhat uneasy hybrid. Make of it what you will.

(Review by David Grundy. The article by Marcus O'Dair on death jazz is available online at <http://music.guardian.co.uk/jazz/story/0,,2207440,00.html>)



CLAUDIA QUINTET – *FOR*

Label: Cuneiform

Release Date: May 2007

Tracklist: I'm So Fickin' Cool; August 5th, 2006; Be Happy; This Too Shall Pass; Rug Boy; For you; Rainy Days/Peanut Vendor Mash-Up; Three Odes: Admiration (for Peter Garland), Nostalgia (for Jan Garbarek), Pity (for Mary Cheney).

Personnel: Drew Gress: acoustic bass; John Hollenbeck: drums, percussion, electric tape preparation (6); Matt Moran: vibraphone, vocals/lyrics (6); Ted Reichman: accordion; Chris Speed: clarinet, tenor saxophone.

In a way, this group's material is built upon paradox; at a first glance, it could sound pretty "simple" to the ears of many obsessive new music aficionados who only live for endangered rhythmical species and finger contortions. Give it a coupla (make that three, or four) attentive tries and think again, as under the appearance of sheer "linear" themes or minimalist repetitions there's a puzzling world of details and structures that, taken as a whole, furnish the compositions with the richness that's typical of a great "progressive" band mixing contemporary jazz, Reich, Piazzolla and Bulgarian folk played with the same attitude of a technically hyper-advanced bionic busker.

"For" is Claudia's fourth CD - note the title's pun - each of its tracks being dedicated to someone, famous or not (check for yourself). Besides the well-known percussive bravura of leader's John Hollenbeck who - incidentally - penned all the pieces, lots of kudos should ideally go to Ted Reichman, whose accordion is the real protagonist of compelling situations ranging from the melancholia-tinged immateriality ("This too shall pass") to the plain virtuosity ("Be happy"). This should not detract from the astounding musicianship and adroitness of the other Claudians (Drew Gress on bass, Matt Moran on vibraphone and Chris Speed on clarinet and tenor sax) completing the line-up of an ensemble that acts as the perfect *trait d'union* between the necessity of something complex and the will of relaxing the nerves every once in a while, still without being able of actually lowering our guard, given that a circuitous construction can always be lurking behind the corner of a single-note melody. Don't worry if you can't find a definition for the Claudia Quintet; just rejoice for their newborn creature, as these guys are extremely serious in what they do.

(Review by Massimo Ricci, originally published at 'Touching Extremes' - <http://spazioinwind.libero.it/extremes/touchinghome.htm>)

DAVE DOUGLAS QUINTET – *LIVE AT THE JAZZ STANDARD*

Label: Koch Records

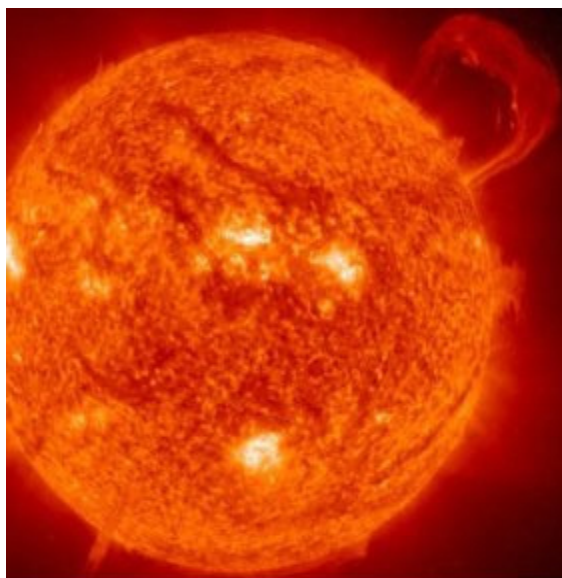
Release Date: July 2007

Tracklist: CD1: Earmarks; Tree and Shrub; War Room; Indian Point; The Cornet is a Fickle Friend; The Next Phase (for Thomas); October Surprise; Seth Thomas. CD2: Meaning and Mystery; Navigations; Redemption; Little Penn; Living Streams; Leaving Autumn; Bonus tracks: Magic Triangle; A Single Sky.

Personnel: Dave Douglas: cornet; Donny McCaslin: tenor saxophone; Uri Caine: Fender Rhodes; James Genus: contrabass; Clarence Penn: drums.

Additional Information: The Quintet performed at 6-night run at the Jazz Standard from 5-10th December 2006. The complete recordings are available at <http://musicstem.com/album/178>.

‘Live at the Jazz Standard’ showcases trumpeter Dave Douglas – on cornet this time – and his quintet, performing live at New York City club the Jazz Standard on various nights in December of 2006. Joining Douglas here are tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin, Fender Rhodes specialist and musical magpie Uri Caine (known for his jazz versions of Mahler and other classical composers), bassist James Genus and drummer Clarence Penn. Originally released as complete download-only sets on Douglas' own Greenleaf Label website, here Douglas has pruned the sets down to 18 cuts over two discs. Furthermore, he's also focused the selection on original compositions never released on any previous albums. In that sense, fans of Douglas' past work with this ensemble on such studio efforts as 2002's ‘Infinite’ and 2006's ‘Meaning and Mystery’ will surely enjoy this, as it essentially plays as an all new recording, and not just a live documentation of the quintet. In fact, disc two focuses on compositions Douglas wrote while delving into the iconic work of innovative pocket-trumpeter Don Cherry, and were initially intended for inclusion on ‘Meaning and Mystery.’ This is soulful, visceral, moody and propulsive post-bop that often leans heavily toward late-'60s and '70s modal and free jazz. Well worth hearing.



MARC EDWARDS – *ION STORM/ 12 VOTES*

Label: Alpha Phonics

Release Date: September 2007

Tracklist: (Ion Storm) Ion Storm; Binary Systems; Molecular Excitation; Star Flakes (Star Ejections); Floating in Space. (Twelve Votes) Live at the Hook – Ion Storm; Morning Dew; Floating in Space; Live at ABC No Rio – Ion Storm/Morning Dew/Floating in Space; Interdimensional Gateway.

Personnel: (Ion Storm) James Duncan: trumpet; Ras Moshe: saxophones; Tor Synder: electric guitar; Marc Edwards: drums. (Twelve Votes) – Blaise Siwula: alto sax; Jeffrey Hayden Shurdut: piano (on ‘Interdimensional Gateway’); Tor Synder, Ernest Anderson III: electric guitars; Francois Grillot: bass; Marc Edwards: drums.

Additional Information: Both albums are available for download at emusic.com and [itunes](http://itunes.com). More information about Marc Edwards, and about the band, can be found at <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/musician.php?id=3102> and www.myspace.com/slipstreamtimetravel.

Marc Edwards is best known for his stint with the 1976 version of the Cecil Taylor Unit, also featuring tenor saxophonist David S. Ware, that produced the oft-praised ‘Dark Unto Themselves’. These days, his project is the New-York based band ‘Slipstream Time Travel’, originally with saxophonist Sabir Mateen, now with Ras Moshe filling the sax chair, along with James Duncan on trumpet and Tor Synder on electric guitar. As Edwards comments in an interview on the ‘All About Jazz’ website, he got

used to playing without a bassist, and has thus evolved a muscular, powerful style designed to fill out the layers in the music that a bassist would normally fill, so the music doesn't feel stripped-down at all: in fact, it's quite the opposite. Thus, on the bass-less 'Ion Storm', where Edwards is the sole member of the rhythm section, there's more meat on many records *with* a bassist.

These two new releases on the label Edwards founded in 1991, Alpha Phonics, are both characterized by their aggression and volume levels. Of the two, 'Ion Storm', with his regular band, is the more jazz-based and 'accessible'; '12 Votes' adds the 2nd guitar of Ernest Andersen III, and, on the final track, alto sax and piano, to create a storm of sound which sometimes recalls the live performances from Pat Metheny and Derek Bailey's 'Sign of Four' in volume level and intensity.

The two guitars produce squalls of Sharrockian dissonance, chattering streams of sound that feel as if they could wail and wail and all night long. There's little respite from the aural assault, although the fourth, and longest track, recorded live at ABC No Rio, features a spook jazz interlude and some walking bass, before descending back into the psychedelic (psychotic?) maelstrom.

But it's with the addition of Jeffrey Hayden Shurdut's piano on the final track, 'Interdimensional Gateway,' that things are really pushed to the max – the texture becomes thicker than ever, perhaps too thick, recalling the sludginess of the Metheny/Bailey collaboration I mentioned above, and a lot of big-band free improvisation. With no solos or apparent form as such – just everyone playing at once, everyone soloing at once, in the manner of say Alan Silva's 'Luna Surface,' or elements of Peter Brotzmann's music – it's can be hard to find a way in, to penetrate the thicket of noise, and the best way to experience it is probably as a hallucinatory wash that batters you into total immersion/submission. Shurdut's piano exists more as a presence, an aural haze, an entity of sound rather than line. Rather than the crisp percussiveness which the instrument can produce, it becomes smeared by the other musicians so that it exists as just another element in the texture: you know it's there even if you can't really hear what it's doing. The bass, meanwhile, is a penumbral rumbling presence trying to make an order, a line through the screaming thicket of sound-wall-noise – a hopeless task!

Well, neither of these records are subtle, and both are very, very noisy, but I haven't felt this exhilarated for quite a while, and it's fun being caught up in such a screeching, no-holds barred slab of music. **(Review by David Grundy)**



KURT ELLING – *NIGHT MOVES*

Label: Concorde **Release Date:** April 2007

Tracklist: Nightmoves; Tight; Change Partners/If You Never Come to Me; Undun; Where Are You, My Love; And We Will Fly; The Waking; The Sleepers; Leaving Again/In The Wee Small Hours; A New Body And Soul; I Like the Sunrise.

Personnel: Kurt Elling: vocals; Laurence Hobgood: piano; Willie Jones, III: drums; Christian McBride: bass (1-4,6,10); Rob Amster: bass (5,7,8,11); Rob Mounsey: electric piano, keyboards (1, 4, 6); Guilherme Monteiro: guitar (3,6); Bob Mintzer: tenor sax (1); Howard Levy: harmonica (3); Gregoire Maret: harmonica (6); The Escher String Quartet (5,8).

This is likely to be a divisive record with people brought up with the milliard of Sinatra clones likely to find little to enjoy in the uncompromising set by American singer Kurt Elling. For those of us who have grown up listening to singers such as the late Betty Carter who have remained defiantly faithful to the tenets of jazz however, this new disc is very much to be welcomed.

Largely eschewing a programme of standards, Elling's rich tone lends itself to a set of originals, in many cases being settings of poetry. In two of the instances where he elects to sing repertoire from the Broadway songbook, these are based upon transcriptions from solos by the great tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon. Whilst the reading of "Body & Soul" is something of a 10-minute tour de force (enough to make you forget this tune's reputation as a vehicle for saxophone prowess), the distinctly unsentimental arrangement of the small string ensemble on "Where are you" renders this a definitive version of the tune in my estimation. This is one of the best things on the whole album. The other two standards are bolted into medleys incorporating themes by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Keith Jarrett – the version of "Change partners / If you never come to me" highlighting just how good the lyrics of these tunes are. This is a particularly inspired coupling. Unfortunately, the rendering of Duke Ellington's "I like the sunrise" that closes the disc only serves to demonstrate that, amongst that composer's many talents, he did not always hit the bull's eye when it came to song writing.

The rest of the disc offers an example of Kurt Elling's versatility and includes a funky version the pop song "Undun" with Bob Mintzer contributing some choice tenor. There is also a short, snappy version of Betty Carter's own tune "Tight" that allows the singer to pay his respects the late chanteuse. No small part of the success of this disc is due to the well-crafted arrangements by Rob Mounsey and Laurence Hopgood, who also takes the piano chair in Elling's regular trio. Willie Jones III does sterling job on drums and bass duties are shared between Rob Amster and guest Christian McBride.

All told, this is a CD that gets better with each successive listening and, if some of the risks taken do not quite work, overall there is plenty to recommend it. Should one track on this disc demonstrates Ellings' prowess it is the setting of Theodore Roethke's poem "The Waking" where he is accompanied solely by Ron Amster's bass. After an initial hearing, the accompanying hook sounded familiar and it eventually dawned on me that it was borrowed from Bach's "Sleeper's awake!" There is a passage where Elling climbs up several octaves to land on an almost falsetto G. The effect is pretty much electrifying.

Well recorded and offering a varied programme, "Night moves" is a disc that has ensconced in my CD playing over the last few weeks. Hip, swinging and demonstrating a considerable degree of skill where the integrity of the music is never compromised, this disc proves Elling to be the peer of this generation of male jazz singers. A very good record indeed. **(Review by Ian Thumwood)**

KAHIL EL'ZABAR'S INFINITY ORCHESTRA – *TRANSMIGRATION*

Label: Delmark **Release Date:** April 2007

Tracklist: Soul to Groove; Speaking in Tongues; Transmigration; Nu Art Claiming Earth; Return of the Lost Tribe.

Personnel: Kahil El' abar: percussion, leader; Ernest Dawkins: alto sax, percussion; Joseph Bowie: trombone, percussion; Ilyes Ferfera: alto sax; Grat Martinez: baritone sax; Arnaud Rouanet: tenor sax; Marc Closier: tenor sax; Karlis Vanags: sax; Noris Kolmanis: sax; Benoit Berthe: sax; Fabien Deyts: trumpet; Yann Grillon: trumpet; Piero Pepin: trumpet; Vincent Gaugere: trumpet; Dominique Darrouzet:

trumpet; Jean Dousteysier: clarinet; Christian Patzer: flute; Jeremi Ortal: trombone; Guillaume Ballin: trombone; Clement Billardello: guitar; Xavier Corpice: guitar; Natalie Gaucher: vocal; Bindi Mahamat: vocal rap; Remi Bernis: vocal rap; Stephane Castanet: DJ; Nicolas Perrin: DJ turntablist; Olivier Soubles: piano; Marianne Thiebaut: djembe; Manue Peran: djembe; Jonathan Verbaere: djembe; Yacoura Silla: djembe, balafon; Yvain Chambard: balafon, percussion; Pascale Martinez, Estelle Renault: percussion; Herve Mignon: electric bass; Xavier Hayet: acoustic bass; Phillipe Gaubert, Antonin Mallaret, Yoann Scheidt: drums. **Additional Information:** Recorded live in Bordeaux, France, in 2005.

I was all set to write-up a party-friendly, spazz-happy record, but to tell you the truth, it just didn't hold my attention and was really wrong for my current mindset. I need something more random and less hip, something maybe not necessarily mind-blowing, but interesting and exotic and ridiculous. I need to distance myself from the DJs and laptop-artists and solo-outfits and half-cocked ideas and immerse myself in something bigger, some sort of cultural melting pot of styles and backgrounds and musicians. I need something more than a quartet or a quintet or a sextet of players, I need a fucking small village of musical minds playing as one. I need something both new and old, a bridging of eras and mindsets, something that stretches out in all directions with exuberance, excitement and joy, and something celebratory to bring in this holiday weekend. So, what the hell, I'm heading to a port city in the southwest of France to experience the live, multi-layered, ethnic barrage of free jazz, big band, soul-jazz, funk and hip-hop by a 39-piece orchestra. While I may actually be spending this pleasantly cool and quiet Chicago Friday night huddled over my laptop with a Honker's Ale and an attention hungry cat, as far as my mind and ears are concerned, I'm sitting front-and-center at the National Theatre of Bordeaux, Aquitaine, France, drunk on their world-famous wine and smiling broadly at the orchestrating antics of Kahil El'Zabar as he leads his Infinity Orchestra through the rambunctious hour-long set of Transmigration.

El'Zabar is a true Chicago jazz musician; he is multi-talented, highly committed and part of more eccentrically wonderful projects than there is time to list. A product of the AACM, he is a percussionist, arranger, composer, conductor, clothes/costume designer, educator and community leader. As a musician, he began at a young age honing his skills with early incarnations of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and along with playing alongside everyone from Dizzy Gillespie, Nina Simone, Stevie Wonder and Cannonball Adderley, he has lead and played in groups like the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, the JUBA Collective and the Ritual Trio. There are many other interesting tidbits to El'Zabar's career as well, for example, clothes designing for Nina Simone, artist in residence/Master of Carnival in Bordeaux, or arranging the stage performances of The Lion King, but we really should concentrate on the album at hand.

The origination of the Infinity Orchestra reaches back to 1978 when El'Zabar pieced together an all-Chicago ensemble that let him experiment with his increasingly ambitious big-band compositions. In fact, one piece from those experimental days appears on this release, the album closer "Return of the Last Tribe." Inspired then by the works of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Archie Shepp's big-band excursions and now influenced by myriad of geographically concentrated styles including free jazz in France (especially BYG Actuel releases, though not nearly as challenging), indigenous African percussion (most notably the balafon and djembe) and American rap and turntablism, El'Zabar has arranged and orchestrated a skillfully performed and joyous album with his French 39-piece cross-generational ensemble in Transmigration, which may not be perfect, but is certainly a treat to experience.

The album opens with the very curious “Soul to Groove,” certainly not what I was expecting at least. Kicking off with a turntable solo, a solo free jazz tenor sax enters two minutes later wailing away like there’s no tomorrow. It’s not cheesy in the least, which in itself is a success. Bombastic orchestra cheers and funky guitar riffing egg on the duet before dissolving back to just solo turntable once again; it is certainly not the first pair of the two genres, but it is handily pulled off. Now “Nu Art Claiming Earth” on the other hand is not nearly as successful and actually bends toward unlistenable. This times rhymes are added to the mix care of French rapper Bindi Mahamat, and with no offense to his flow, it just doesn’t work. The song drags on for fifteen-minutes through a barrage of different movements, but if anything, just disenchants the promising album opener.

The centerpiece of Transmigration is the 24-minute “Speaking in Tongues,” though while simple from an arrangement standpoint contains fantastic musicianship and is a very rewarding track. Kicking off with the melodic percussive sound of the balafon, a West African xylophone of sorts, it meanders through three phases each spotlighting a different soloist, trumpeter Piero Pepin, clarinetist Jean Dousteysier, and alto saxophonist Benoit Berthe. Like every solo on the disc, they are inspired and fantastic, and in fact, the solos are the main attraction of the album. On “Return of the Lost Tribe,” the only two non-French musicians, Chicagoans Ernest Dawkins (New Horizons Ensemble) and Joseph Bowie (Defunkt) each provide emotional outbursts to the grooving orchestral swing led by El’Zabar. Again, it would be a far cry to call any of it classic, but it is very enjoyable and a much-welcomed aural escape from most of what gets released these days.

So after a ridiculously jading week, it feels great to lose myself in the heart-felt eccentricities of Kahil El’Zabar and his orchestra. No it won’t win you many cool points in the hipster realm of things and no it won’t blow your mind from a musical you-have-never-experienced-something-like-this-before standpoint, but it will put a grin on your face, make your head sway and probably send you to the liner notes a couple times to see who just ripped that ridiculous clarinet solo. What else could you want? Well, maybe a bottle of Bordeaux’s world-famous wine...

(Review by Michael Ardaiole, originally published at audiversity.com).



SONNY FORTUNE – *YOU AND THE NIGHT AND THE MUSIC*

Label: 18th & Vine

Release Date: August 2007

Tracklist: Sweet Georgia Brown; You and the Night and the Music; Charade; 'Round Midnight; Besame Mucho; Love Song; The End of a Love Affair; For Duke and Cannon; Bebop.

Personnel: Sonny Fortune: alto sax, flute (4, 6); George Cables: piano; Chip Jackson: bass; Steve Johns: drums

Fortune, like Charles Tolliver (whose 'With Love' is one of this issue's discs of the year), belongs to what could very well be described as the lost generation of jazz. These men, and like-minded musicians, such as Billy Harper and Stanley Cowell, have been rather consistently overlooked, the reason being that their heyday, in the late 60s/early 70s, coincided with the rise of fusion and the sidelining of the sort of jazz idiom that they worked in: modern post-bop with nods to free jazz and the avant-garde (in spirit and energy if less often in musical content). Fortune, to be fair, did have some involvement in the fusion movement, appearing on Miles Davis' extraordinary live double albums 'Agharta' and 'Pangaea', and these could be his best known appearances on record, although that honour could also go to his days as a sideman with McCoy Tyner, during the period when the latter was recording for Milestone records, and really beginning to find his voice as a leader, after a few uncertain years following the death of Coltrane. He also had brushes with the avant-garde, playing on Pharoah Sanders' 1969 freakout 'Izipho Zam.'

Like Sanders, his Coltrane influences were always pronounced, and he acknowledges this fact, but they were not as overwhelming as one sometimes felt they were with Tyner's other 70s saxophonist, Azar Lawrence, and Fortune is most definitely a player with an individual style. His soprano sax playing had a hard edge very different from the fervent Orientalism of Coltrane's approach, his alto tone was sharp and tart, and his flute added textural refreshment, though there was always the lingering feeling that this is an instrument often used in jazz for novelty effect, (even Eric Dolphy didn't give his greatest performances on it).

'You and the Night and the Music' finds him in the sort of post-bop mode, which, if this can be said about any one style in the notoriously diverse jazz scene of today, has come to constitute the music's mainstream tradition. He's joined on this date by a fine rhythm section, and many seasoned jazz listeners will undoubtedly relish the presence of pianist George Cables. Maybe not an absolute top-league soloist, but nonetheless a very attractive player, he has provided reliable backing over the years to the likes of Sonny Rollins, Freddie Hubbard and Woody Shaw, and had particularly notable stints with Dexter Gordon and Art Pepper. I've heard him described as "everyone's favourite sideman," and with that in mind, he perfectly suits this date. While Fortune is the best-known player of the quartet, it's not about showing-off, or an ego-trip for the leader – it's a comfortable medium, with plenty of virtuosity, if in somewhat contained form: tracks never outstay their welcome, and sometimes fade out. Nevertheless, the penetrating quality that was especially noticeable in Fortune's stint with Tyner is still there, heard in some characteristic rapid-fire runs which swoop upwards to piercing high sonorities, then end with a brief downward flourish. This seems to inspire Cables, who has some uncharacteristically heated moments in which right hand runs are juxtaposed with crashing left hand chords, Tyner-style. That's not really his forte, though, and he clearly prefers to lay down a relaxed, laid-back, self-possessed vibe, seen at its best on a track like 'Charade', where his solo has a palpable sense of joy about it – satisfaction, even glee.

Still, I couldn't help feeling slightly dissatisfied as I listened: the most apt word I can find to describe the CD is 'solid', whereas I'd rather it was 'exceptional,' or at least innovative. Maybe I'm demanding too much, but I did find myself asking: who needs another version of 'Round Midnight'? True, it's a little different in that Fortune delivers it,

with limpid grace, on the flute, giving it a cool, relaxed tone, but that does make it feel somewhat distanced - the melody coasts past without really registering any impact. It's become so familiar that to give it any sort of resonance, something quite special or unusual has to be done with it - a prime example of that would be Bobby McFerrin's ethereal vocalised version with Herbie Hancock on the 'Round Midnight' soundtrack, which shouldn't work, but does. As it is, here, you get exactly what you might expect: everything is in its right place. There are times though, when that's not enough, when what you actually want is something with more rough edges, which employs fire rather than polish.

And, to be honest, the whole record is similarly predictable, especially when you consider how powerful, passionate and inventive Fortune's performances with McCoy Tyner in the 70s could be. Consequently, it's the sort of thing that's not really going to rock anybody's boat overmuch, but, still, it's good to know that guys like Fortune are still making music, and that there are still times when his playing really sparkles.

(Review by David Grundy)



ERIK FRIEDLANDER - *BLOCK ICE AND PROPANE*

Label: SkipStone Records

Release Date: August 2007

Tracklist: King Rig; Dream Song; Airstream Envy; Road Weary; Night White; Block Ice & Propane; A Thousand Unpieced Suns; Rushmore; Rusting in Honeysuckle; Cold Chicken; Yakime; Pressure Cooking; Valley of Fire.

Personnel: Erik Friedlander: cello, tuning forks; Scott Solter: engineer, live processing.

A veteran of New York's downtown scene (and the son of famous jazz photographer Lee Friedlander) Erik Friedlander's perhaps best known for his work with John Zorn, and, with a grounding in classical music and session work (in contexts ranging from Courtney Love's band to Hollywood musicals), he's an incredibly gifted musician technically, whatever genre he's performing in. Before starting on the cello, his main instrument, he played guitar from the age of 6, and this new solo album in some ways marks a return to those experiences, as well as to other memories from his childhood.

His previous solo cello disc, 'Matador' (2003), consisted of improvisations inspired by French surrealist poetry. 'Block Ice and Propane' is considerably less avant-garde, and is probably his most accessible work so far. In the official 'electronic press kit' (a short promotional video available online), he fills in some of the background: "Every summer my parents would pack us up for months of camping. Cities, campgrounds, parades - thousands of miles of highway travel. Writing these pieces put me back in that camper." The album then, consists of a series of compositions and improvisations (it's

often hard to tell which), inspired by his childhood memories of travel across the continent – a kind of aural road movie. In fact, it's easy to picture it as the soundtrack to an actual road movie, and, despite being a concept album, it's similar to many of those movies in that it's more about mood, atmosphere, and character than specific narrative incident.

Solo cello is an unusual choice for an album, particularly a jazz one (I personally think it's stretching things to call this jazz – but, saying that, what you would call it instead is also beyond me). This is not a problem, though: Friedlander exploits the capabilities of his instrument to the full, although here he tends to focus on a particular sound quality, a particular type of resonance, playing the cello pizzicato, as if it was a rich, deep-toned guitar, and spinning out melodies alternately buoyant and rustic or dreamy and hazy (as in the gorgeous second track).

He himself says that playing the cello in this way, which involves reaching back to what he calls the “finger-picking” techniques of his guitar background, enabled him to create a music that “sounded like Americana - very simple, unadorned, very earnest, with pretty melodies that were very direct.” There's a pronounced folk feel, but not in the sense that he plays traditional folk melodies – it's perhaps more an *idea* of folk music and culture, a filtering of low art through high art, which takes some of its characteristics as inspiration but retains a separateness, the individual voice of the musician involved in its creation never being subsumed by the traditions he draws from (or creates, in the case of Aaron Copland's ‘Appalachian Spring’).

It also raises the idea that there might be a specifically midwestern sound, seen also in the solo work of Keith Jarrett, Pat Metheny (particularly his album 'Beyond the Missouri Sky' with bassist Charlie Haden, and some of Bill Frisell's more 'American'-style albums, with their evocative songs like 'Strange Meeting.' As with John Surman's wonderful 'The Spaces in Between', an album that I feel is, in many ways, quintessentially English, it taps into a particular way of looking at the world that can be said to be (partly) a national characteristic - or at least a characteristic of a nation's art. Thus, I don't feel that it's too much of a stretch to say that ‘Block Ice and Propane’ is, in many way, quintessentially American. You may feel resistance to such a claim, may feel that I'm simply tapping into a sentimentalised idea of what America means, a cliché we've seen and heard in hundreds of movies and books: something vaguely elegiac and nostalgic, but ultimately not grounded in reality. It's hard to deny it's charms though, and so, in this case, I think I'll have to write ‘in praise of dreams’ (as Jan Garbarek's album title puts it) – not that this is the only thing that music can do, but it is one thing it does well.

Also, we shouldn't overlook the fact that, while everything sounds very effortless and spontaneous, this sort of stuff doesn't just come rolling out, especially considering that this is solo cello, and that puts it into a different class. The cello is mostly unadorned, putting enormous demands on Friedlander to be engaging at all times (although he is helped out a little bit by the reverberant sound engineering, which fills the sound out, and the subtle electronic background to track 2). ‘Airstream Envy’ is one of the best demonstrations of how he is: it begins with the sort of phrasing and arco tone you'd expect from a Bach cello suite, then transforms into a medium-tempo Appalachian hoe-down.

There are a few, scattered nods to the avant-garde, with the more anguished, droning, de-tuned sound of ‘Road Wary’ and ‘Pressure Cooking,’ and the virtuoso

plucking of 'Cold Chicken.' Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to approach this expecting anything other than low-key melodicism: what prevails is the folky Americana feel I've been outlining above. I find this very attractive; some may find it rather dull and mind-numbing (though all the other reviews I've read have been very positive). We can hardly criticise it for being too melodic, although I will say that it's all much of a muchness - no track in particular really stands out. It's very pleasing, an excellent demonstration of Friedlander's gifts, and unusual for being a solo cello record, though not an absolutely phenomenal album.

(Review by David Grundy)

GLASGOW IMPROVISERS ORCHESTRA WITH BARRY GUY - *FALKIRK*

Label: FMR

Release Date: November 2007

Tracklist: Improvisation; Witch Gong Game II/10

Personnel: Emma Roche: flute, baroque flute; Matthew Studdert-Kennedy: flute; Nick Fells: shakuhachi; Daniel Padden: clarinet, voice, percussion; Nicola MacDonald: voice; Robert Henderson, Matt Cairns: trumpet; George Murray: trombone; Pete Dowling: alto sax; Raymond MacDonald: alto and soprano sax; Graeme Wilson: tenor and baritone sax; John Burgess: tenor sax, bass clarinet; Bill Wells: keyboard; George Burt, Neil Davidson: guitar; Peter Nicholson: cello; Maya Homburger: baroque violin; Una MacGlone, George Lyle, Barry Guy: double-bass; Mike Travis: drums.

Although they have already released two discs with the likes of Evan Parker and Maggie Nicols, "Falkirk" marks my first encounter with the GIO, a collective of clever musicians coming from the most disparate backgrounds (the press release defines them as "jazz, contemporary classical, experimental pop and sound art"). The CD, recorded live at Falkirk's Callendar House in 2005, contains a graciously variegated 16-minute improvisation and a very long piece by double bassist and composer Barry Guy - a collaborator of the Orchestra since the beginning in 2002 - called "Witch Gong Game II/10". In this track, which is obviously the album's backbone, the score consists of a set of panels containing painter and percussionist Alan Davie's graphic signs, which should indicate "different kinds of music floating over a black void". This implies a symbolic message of unity and communion through the act of playing together, whatever the genre and the technical expertise involved, in "the darkness of an indifferent universe". Besides Guy, violinist Maya Homburger is featured as a special guest. The aim is high given the artistic intent, yet the ensemble is tight enough to guarantee several moments of really interesting emotional outburst, swaying music that changes in speed and intensity at the flick of a switch but succeeds in making the listener "reflect about the difficulty" rather than "look for distractions". On a few occasions, the mixture of articulation and freedom made me think of Keith Tippett's Centipede; elsewhere, beautiful horn arrangements lead to territories akin to Frank Zappa's work with the London Symphony Orchestra. This stuff blasts frequently and rubs rarely, all the while giving the idea of a serious commitment from those concerned.

(Review by Massimo Ricci, originally published at 'Touching Extremes' -

<http://spazioinwind.libero.it/extremes/touchinghome.htm>)

HERBIE HANCOCK – *RIVER: THE JONI LETTERS*



Label: Verve

Release Date: September 2007

Tracklist: Court and Spark; Edith and the Kingpin; Both Sides Now; River; Sweet Bird; Tea Leaf Propechy; Solitude; Amelia; Nefertiti; The Jungle Line.

Personnel: Herbie Hancock: piano; Wayne Shorter: soprano and tenor saxophones; Lionel Loueke: guitar; Dave Holland: bass; Vinnie Colaiuta: drums; with guests - Norah Jones: vocal (1); Tina Turner: vocal (2); Corinne Bailey Rae: vocal (4); Joni Mitchell: vocal (6); Luciana Souza: vocal (8); Leonard Cohen: vocal (10).

This was the surprise winner of Album of the Year at the 2008 Grammy Awards – the first jazz album to win since 1965, when *Getz/Gilberto* took the gong. Some may point out that Getz's mellow bossa-nova was hardly the cutting-edge of jazz back then, and Hancock's latest isn't exactly the cutting-edge either. But when an artist of his stature (forgetting, for a moment, the misfiring flirtation with cheesy disco music or the abysmal 'Perfect Shock') covers the songs of one of the most interesting lyricists and musicians of her time, the results are bound to be at least moderately interesting. An added bonus, too, is the presence of guest saxophonist Wayne Shorter, who's on the form of his life at the moment, his playing with his current Quartet having gelled to the extent that I think it easily rivals the classics he made in the 60s such as 'Speak No Evil' or the albums with the Miles Davis Quintet. Here, he adds his usual pithy touches, which is appropriate given that Hancock chooses to emphasise the spaciousness of Joni's music, while ensuring that it doesn't overly simple by adding a little jazz complexity. The end result is understated yet not minimal. Mind you, at times, Shorter plays with such delicacy that he almost disappears into the ether entirely: towards the end of 'Sweet Bird', he occasionally doesn't even play notes, instead playing breathy noises that sound as if they're about to become notes but just hang in the air instead.

The guest vocalists were one of the things that made me worry when I first read about the project: it seemed as though they were chosen simply because they were currently in fashion. As such, this would continue the trend on 'Possibilities', where, for example, Christina Aguilera is hardly a match for Hancock's abilities, regardless of genre - her technically impressive but rather empty vocal pyrotechnics are miles away from Herbie's melodic and harmonic inventions). My suspicions about the guest-list for 'River' were confirmed when I read in an interview that the decision was producer Larry Klein's, yet, ultimately, it is only through examining the music that we can see

Norah Jones has a pleasant voice, but neither she nor Corrine Bailey Rae have the depth and gravitas needed for Mitchell's songs - they sound too young, too innocent, too bright, too fresh (Jones perhaps slightly less so), whereas Mitchell's voice always had a world-weariness and melancholy mixed with flashes of optimism. For that reason 'River' is perhaps the weakest track on the record, despite being one of my favourite Mitchell songs - the original version, on 'Blue', emphasises the lyrics and the melody, with its unobtrusive, sparse piano accompaniment - song as story-telling. Rae, though, starts off in a strange mock-Cockney accent (she's from Leeds), and, crucially, she glides over a line which constitutes a sort of turning-point in the original ("I made my baby cry"), with almost no emotional emphasis. Mitchell herself does guest though, on 'Tea Leaf Prophecy' (the fact that she's only on one track indicates that it's more Hancock's project than hers) - her voice sounds a bit rougher round the edges than in her youth, especially at the beginning of the song, but she's still good.

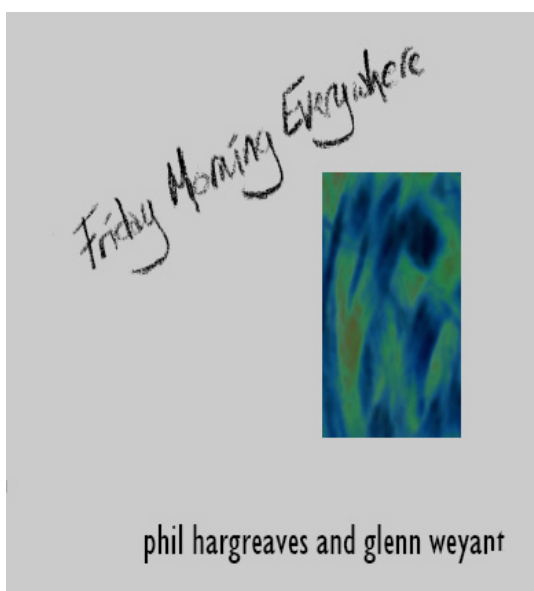
The band has a somewhat impressionistic approach to the songs, particularly on the purely instrumental tracks, which find the musicians subtly alluding to the melody in little fragments that float around in thickets of harmonies. This indirectness may disappoint some people on first listen, but as Hancock says, this is the record where he's paid attention to the lyrics as never before. 'Solitude' is unlike any other reading of the Duke Ellington standard I've heard in the way that it floats around the famous tune. 'Nefertiti', reinvented from the repetitive original, is nice too, and has the same tension: a sense of disquiet at the same time as melodious and attractive beauty - only this time simmering very gently, rather than threatening to boil over as with Tony William's drum surges in the original. Listen out, in particular, for the way Hancock and Shorter respond to each other's trilling runs about a minute and a half in.

'The Jungle Line' closes the album, but feels slightly out of place: Leonard Cohen reads the lyrics as a poem rather than singing them - a nice touch, although it might have benefited from a little singing as well. As it is, Cohen's mysterious, gravely narration make it feel almost as if it's come from a different project. There's much to admire about the track though, such as Hancock's piano coda, and the way he builds to a loud climax before throwing in the catchy main hook again, very quietly, like a ghostly afterthought.

Overall, it lacks a certain something - variety, perhaps, as almost all the performances are down-tempo (with the exception of 'Edith and the Kingpin', which is taken at a fair clip, but still retains the same pensive mood). I think it's more than just that, though: Mitchell's music is deeply rooted in her experience (which frequently translates into universal human experience as well), both the highs and lows, the optimism and the pessimism, the naivety and the disillusionment, but this band interprets it as almost solely regretful, wistful, mellowing-out-with-a-glass-of-wine-with-the-curtains-drawn stuff. Despite doing this slight disservice to the material, it's impeccably

played, and there are many moments of invention and quiet revelation in the improvisations that the musicians spin round the songs. The moodiness of Hancock's recent acoustic work suggests a certain narrowing in his expression, but 'The Joni Letters' is a step up from 'Possibilities' - not just because Hancock's returning to jazz, rather than pop (despite covering the material of a pop singer, albeit one heavily influenced by jazz, and one who played with leading jazzmen), but simply because it's a recording with more depth, subtlety, and atmosphere.

(Review by David Grundy)



**PHIL HARGREAVES/GLENN WEYANT
– *FRIDAY MORNING EVERYWHERE***

Label: Whi-Music

Release Date: 2007

Tracklist: Do not Sing; A Door is Open; Force of Circumstance; Dudu; Sorry; To the Singer; The Lost City; He Did; Neighbourhood; Summer Again; Oilal; Questions for the War; I Will Move

Personnel: Phil Hargreaves: voice, flute, cello, programming, found sounds; Glenn Weyant: Kestrel 920, prepared guitar, piano, found sounds.

Additional Information: Available as a free digital download (MP3 or FLAC format) from the website of Phil Hargreaves' Whi-Music label (<http://www.whi-music.co.uk/fme/index.html>), or as a CD by request (fme@whi-music.co.uk).

Phil Hargreaves is a saxophonist/flautist/vocalist/cellist/composer, active on Liverpool's improvised music scene, who has played with the Frakture Big Band and Simon H. Fell, and has made a fascinating CD with saxophonist Caroline Kraabel ('Where we Were: Shadows of Liverpool', on Leo Records), where improvisations recorded over a couple of years in various resonant acoustic locations around the city (town and concert halls, domes, churches, libraries, pubs, and even under bridges and in road tunnels) are edited into a single soundscape, in which the environment seems to play just as much of a role in dictating the nature of the music as the proclivities of the two musicians.

'Friday Morning Everywhere' is a similar project, at least conceptually (it actually sounds quite different). Hargreaves and Glenn Weyant (a sound-sculptor based in Tuscon, Arizona) have been in online contact for a number of years through the freejazz.org discussion forum, and decided to collaborate, even though they have never actually met each other in person. Instead, they sent each other recordings, which were then edited, looped and layered. This might suggest the Cage-ian randomness of 'sight', an album by Keith Rowe's MIMEO (Music In Movement Electronic Orchestra), in which eleven musicians, spread across Europe, placed 5 minutes of sound anywhere those chose onto a blank CD-R; the 11 discs were then superimposed onto a single disc, which was released without any of them having heard the others' music. However, Hargreaves and Weyant opt for a more controlled approach.

Probably the best person to explain more is Hargreaves himself, in a short explanation he has provided on the whi-music website: "the MO for this was that we each

sent the other some solo/seed recordings including environmental recordings of our two locations. We then played along with them, manipulated them and generally do the things that people of our ilk are prone to do, and then posted them around and back till we felt we'd finished. In this event, I got to do the finishing off; the voices went on near the end of each track, and it was my decision to go for shorter pieces... Even though it was recorded, we're improvisers, and as such I (and I think we, as well) tried to keep to the spirit of improvisation, by respecting earlier decisions, and not over-interfering with the flow, letting the sound dictate the direction. Hopefully, as a result, it's a record of the time it was created in, and the people who lived in those times."

Though the pieces are short, and a great deal of work has obviously gone into putting them together, that spontaneous feeling is there, something found in the best free improv: a mixture of craft and abandon, exploration and consolidation, innovation and tradition. That said, there aren't really any obvious frames of reference – this is pretty much unique, and quite hard to describe. Hargreaves puts in much plucking and scraping on the cello, and adds the occasional flute, while Weyant uses prepared guitar and piano, but most noticeable in the texture is the Kestrel 920, a self-designed sound-sculpture/instrument which he built from junk in his garage when his free jazz saxophone playing was disrupted by the arrival of a baby daughter. It has an extremely complicated working mechanism, which I won't go into now – suffice to say that it is primarily a percussion instrument, operated through strikes, strokes, and blows.

It imparts quite a spacey feel, considerably bulking out the sound, and giving it almost orchestral proportions. Indeed, one thing this album has in abundance is atmosphere: layers are built up in complex, intertwining ways - the two-year period taken to make this is understandable on that basis. These pieces, though they have the feel and elements of improvised music (and Hargreaves has said he wanted to preserve this feel), are carefully crafted in ways that would not be possible in a live real-time performing environment, with just two people, and that says something about the wonders of modern technology.



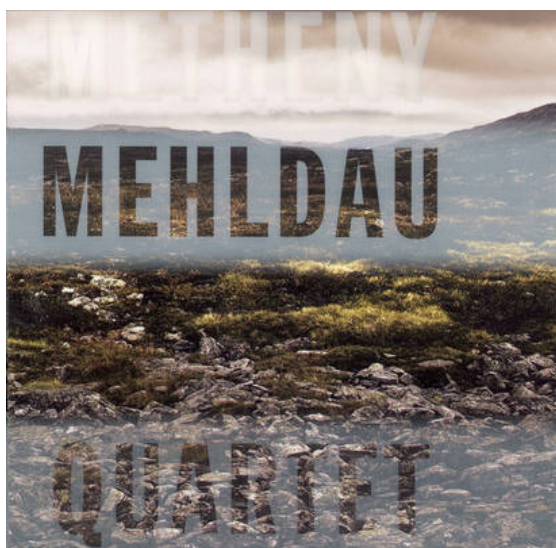
(Above: Glenn Weyant playing the Kestrel 920.)

Nevertheless, there are problems, apparent most obviously in the first track, 'Do Not Sing', which seems unsure as to exactly what it wants to be: with its moody, repeated pattern (which, on the surface, seems simple, but, if you listen closely, is actually built up

of several subtly intertwining layers, probably deriving from the Kestrel 920), it sets itself up as a sophisticated pop song, and the fact that this is overlaid with vocals would seem to confirm that impression. However, these vocals are delivered in what one must presume is a deliberately bizarre way - for 'naive', or ironic effect? They don't really follow any melodic line, and they're not quite speech, not quite song (but not Schoenbergian *sprechtime* either). They would seem to indicate a deliberate 'weirdness', a deliberate 'experimentalism', yet this doesn't really fit with the 'backing track.' Perhaps the aim is to combine a more primitive, folky ethos with modernity; whatever the case, in the end, the piece is caught between two poles, and falls short of what it could have been.

The most obvious function of the vocals is to give the tracks some focus, to reconcile them with traditional 'song' form, and to provide some sort of thematic and lyrical thread (although the subject matter of the poems that Hargreaves sings are pretty disparate, from love to war to singing itself). However, I'm not sure that this really works - he admits that they were added late on, and it might have been wiser to let the textures unfold more gradually, to reveal their details over a longer period.

Consequently, the most successful tracks are generally the instrumental ones, such as the mysterious 'Lost City.' I realize that I shouldn't judge the vocals in terms of conventional standards (if we did this, Captain Beefheart would be dismissed out-of-hand), but I do still yearn for something slightly more melodic (though the style is admittedly effective, as Hargreaves' voice takes on particularly biting, gruff and harsh overtones when he assumes the persona of an unnamed warmonger on 'Questions for the War'). Still, even if the album is not entirely a success, it does conclude with an attractive piece, a quiet reverie that suggests resolution, as Weyant's Debussyian piano accompanies Hargreaves' poem about a peaceful moment lying in, of all places, a graveyard. There is definitely potential here for future collaborations, and I look forward with interest to what these men will do next. **(Review by David Grundy)**



**PAT METHENY/BRAD MEHLDAU -
METHENY/MEHLDAU QUARTET**

Label: Nonesuch

Release Date: March 2007

Tracklist: A Night Away/ The Sound of Water/ Fear and Trembling/ So Much Music Everywhere/ Towards the Light/ Long Before/ La Tierra Que No Olvida/ Santa Cruz Slacker/ Secret Beach/ Silent Movie/ Marta's Theme (from *Passagio per il Paradiso*)

Personnel: Pat Metheny: electric guitar, 42-string Pikasso guitar (2), acoustic guitar (4), guitar synth (5,9); Brad Mehldau: piano; Larry Grenadier: bass; Jeff Ballard: drums.

Additional Information: Studio recording, New York, December 2005. Available on iTunes.

I probably don't need to include too many background details, as most readers will be familiar with them, so I'll present them in brief only: big-haired, multi Grammy-winning, 50-something fusion guitarist, who's made occasional forays into the avant-garde, meets thoughtful, classically-trained jazz pianist, best-known for his trio work and

for daring to include covers of songs by artists like Nick Drake and Radiohead in his programmes. Last year saw the release of *'Metheny/Mehldau'* (also on Nonesuch), which did exactly what it said on the tin, presenting the two playing together, mostly in duet, but with bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Jeff Ballard filling things out on a few numbers. Comparisons with Jim Hall and Bill Evans' famous 1960s collaboration inevitably reared their collective heads, and there was a general abundance of praise and positive adjectives, coupled with a few doubts about blandness and sameness in terms of texture and composition. 2007's follow-up reverses the balance of its predecessor; the majority of the tracks on *'Quartet'* feature the expanded group, with Grenadier and Ballard, and are interspersed with a few duets.

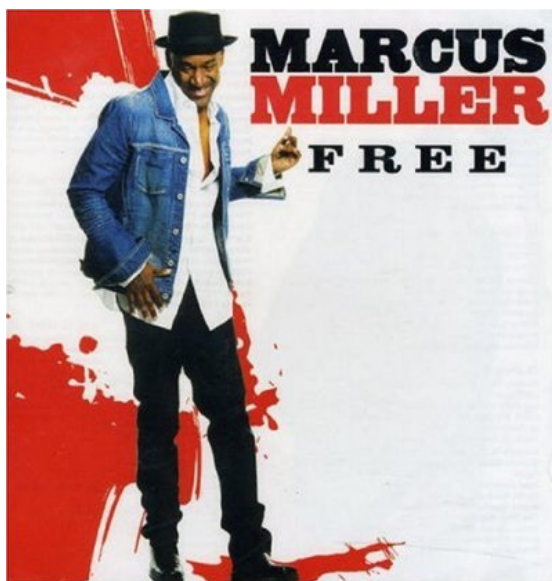
Well, clearly it takes some class and sensitivity to make this sort of thing work on a basic level: guitar and piano are not the most natural fit, and Metheny and Mehldau do have a pretty solid level of interaction; one will pick up a melodic idea from the other and transform it, leading onto another idea, and thus keeping up momentum and flow in the improvisation. Trouble is, it never really feels like anyone is stretching themselves: Ballard keeps a steady, rockish beat, Grenadier plays repetitive grooves and hooks to keep everything bubbling away at a gentle swing underneath, Metheny shows off some trademark licks and stylistic tics, Mehldau has a few melodic prods before settling for repetition to build excitement and merging into the background with the guitar.

The pianist is perhaps a more interesting soloist than Metheny, if a little more erratic; he tends to favour right hand melodic lines with a minimum of left hand interjection, although his style is quite varied, and he'll sometimes rely on phraseology from blues or even country music. For me, the most interesting points in his playing come at the beginning of his solos, when it sometimes sounds as if his fingers are almost stumbling over the keys - a deliberate effect, as if he's hesitantly trying to say something, and getting it out imperfectly. It *almost* creates a sense of effort, of questing - but in the end, it's too languid for that: introspective, but not with the purifying melancholy of Bill Evans (often cited as an influence) - more aimless, less able to revel in beauty of sound (harmony/melodic contour). In an interview for the Guardian about the making of this album, he comments, "I want a spontaneous jazz solo to have a narrative arc, and not just be a pasted-together collection of ideas," but in a way, that's what his solos here do feel like - they start off strongly, before giving up and petering out, taking the line for a walk and then deciding to pack up and head home instead. The overall effect is rather frigid, and I think that's why I've never really been able to connect with his playing. It's very polished, very sophisticated and assured, but it leaves me cold.

Such a fault is not just that of an individual musician, but of the album too. There's little emotional variety or depth; aside from Mehldau's faintly troubled *'Fear and Trembling'* (with Metheny on guitar synth throwing in a bit of electronic distortion in between those intensely irritating high-pitched, trailing-off notes he places at the end of phrases), it ambles along in a strange middle ground, caught between quiet meditation (which the initial, more successful album focused on) and vaguely buoyant mid tempo numbers. Recorded at the same sessions as the Metheny/Mehldau, these performances do feel a bit like off-casts from the first project, rather than a fully fledged sequel: on a set of undistinguished material, the Quartet never does anything more than go through the motions. It's all somewhat dispiriting, especially if you compare it to the work of someone like pianist Lafayette Gilchrist, a young-ish musician emerging as a leader in his

own right from under the shadow of David Murray, in whose group he has played for some years. While Metheny and Mehldau's collaboration may be more polished and apparently effortless, it's ultimately far less compelling. It's not just how you say it, but what you say as well - this group knows exactly how to say things, how to give a pleasant, highly competent surface sheen, but when you strip that away, there's not really an awful lot there. **(Review by David Grundy)**

MARCUS MILLER – *FREE*



Label: Dreyfus Jazz

Release Date: June 2007

Tracklist: Blast; Funk Joint; Free; Strum; Milky Way; Pluck (Interlude); When I Fall In Love; Jean-Pierre; Higher Ground; What Is Hip?

Personnel: Marcus Miller: bass, bass clarinet, soprano sax, keyboards, sitar, vocals; Gregoire Maret: harmonica; Patches Stewart: trumpet, flugelhorn; David Sanborn: alto sax; Tom Scott: tenor sax; Corinne Bailey Rae: vocals (3); Keb Mo: vocals; Gussie Miller, La Lah Hathaway: vocals; Bernard Wright, Bobby Sparks: organ, synths; Andrea Braido, Paul Jackson, Jr.: guitar; Teddy Cambell, Poogie Bell: drums

Additional Information: A UK/Japan-only release, the album will shortly appear in America under the title 'Marcus.' The label will be Concord Records, and there will be four extra tracks.

Corinne Bailey Rae also appears on this release, a much more pop-oriented album by multi-instrumentalist/producer Miller. She sounds much more at home in this setting, crooning away over the dream and easy soul groove of 'Free', though Miller's slap bass sound is a bit intrusive underneath and doesn't really suite the mood of the song. The cover turns Deneice William's original version into something more lilting and breezy, and I think I actually prefer it - it's got more zip but it's not too whizzy. Mind you, the closing alto sax solo lets things down a bit – it's laboured and unsubtle and relies on very, very clichéd stock phrases.

On the album as a whole, Miller continues the trend set by his previous studio outing, 'Silver Rain': slick, polished grooves, with much slap-bass, star guest vocal appearances and nothing very adventurous or memorable. The opener finds him playing sitar in addition to his multitude of other roles, but only in order to deliver a cheesy Oriental-flavoured reminiscent of the sort of unsuccessful, vaguely ethnic pop that gets thrown under the 'world music' banner. David Sanborn makes an appearance too, but only for a forgettable solo that he could have probably played his sleep.

Some promise is shown during the opening section of 'When I Fall in Love', as Miller sets out the familiar melody with a lovely bass clarinet tone, but the song is soon spoiled by cheesy organ and synth-string sounds and a clunky drum beat that comes in for Miller's bass solo, which doesn't suit the mood at all.

Miller doesn't seem to realise that there's to life than creating butt-shaking grooves. The best groove music does create these, true, but it does something with it that somehow feels important, rather than settling for Miller's slick superficiality. Take the following examples: James Brown's or Fela Kuti's raw sexuality and drive, Miles Davis'

aggressive thickets of sounds from the mid-70s, Herbie Hancock's joyous extended jams, with a little bit of melancholy thrown in to the mix. Compared to these, Miller just feels too one track. On the other hand, when he attempts variety, as on 'When I Fall In Love', it comes off as cheesy and tacky. He's undoubtedly a highly skilled musician, and, as he showed on his earlier work, an arranger and composer of some skill, but he needs to get out of this easy coasting and go for something with a bit more depth to it. And he's never escaped those dated 1980s touches either. **(Review by David Grundy)**

ROSCOE MITCHELL – *COMPOSITION/IMPROVISATION NOS. 1, 2 & 3*



Label: ECM

Release Date: March 2007

Tracklist: I (from Composition/Improvisation 2); II (from C/I 2); III (from C/I 3); IV (from C/I 1); V (from C/I 2); VI (from C/I 2); VII (from C/I 2); VIII (from C/I 1); IX (from C/I 2).

Personnel: Roscoe Mitchell: soprano saxophone; Evan Parker: soprano and tenor saxophones; Anders Svanoe: alto and baritone saxophones; John Rangecroft: clarinet; Neil Metcalfe: flute; Corey Wilkes: trumpet, flugelhorn; Nils Bultmann: viola; Philipp Wachsmann: violin; Marcio Mattos: cello; Craig Taborn: piano; Jaribu Shahid: bass; Barry Guy: bass; Tani Tabbal: drums, percussion, Paul Lytton: drums, percussion.

This release sees the mouth-watering prospect of a Transatlantic Art Ensemble, bringing together 5 members of Roscoe Mitchell's Art Ensemble of Chicago and Note Factory with 9 members of Evan Parker's Electro-Acoustic Ensemble, and has thus been eagerly awaited by improv fans since it was recorded in September of 2004. The unusual summit meeting took place as part of the "Unforeseen" symposium for improvised music in Munich, curated by the Munich Kulturreferat and the musicology department of the Ludwig Maximilian University, which examined real-time creativity for a week, with lectures, workshops, and commissioned works by Roscoe Mitchell and Evan Parker. The two composer/improvisers assembled the 14-piece ensemble, which performed Parker's music on September 10th, and Mitchell's music on September 11th.

A great concept, but only sporadically compelling in execution. The music quite consciously straddles the line between contemporary classical composition and free jazz/improvisation. For the most part it sounds like chamber music -- all 14 musicians seldom play in unison. The one major exception is the Globe Unity Orchestra-like free-for-all in Part III, which begins sounding like a Muhal Richard Abrams composition, and then gives way to an extended Parker tenor solo, eventually joined by the rest of the band in a standard free improv blow-out. The strings (Philipp Wachsmann on violin, Nils Bultmann on viola, Marcio Mattos on cello and Barry Guy and Jaribu Shahid on bass) play a crucial role throughout in establishing a more classical-sounding timbre than one would expect from a Mitchell/Parker summit. Percussion (Paul Lytton and Tani Tabbal) is muted with a few dramatic exceptions. Woodwinds (Mitchell, Parker and Anders Svanoe on saxes, John Rangecroft on clarinet, and Neil Metcalfe on flute) are prominent

throughout, intertwining with the strings to create a Second Viennese School (Schoenberg/Webern/Berg) soundscape. Corey Wilkes on trumpet and Craig Taborn on piano are also both prominently featured. Bizarrely enough, the complete 'Composition/Improvisation' pieces don't seem to appear in their entirety on the record; if this is the case, we get a somewhat bizarre juxtaposition of different movements from different works (according to the ECM website, Parts I, II, V, VII and IX derive from C/I No. 2, Parts IV and VIII from C/I No. 1, and Part III derives from C/I No. 3.) Indeed, while the different tracks do seem to cohere together, it feels as if there's something missing.

I'm curious about the Evan Parker performance the night before -- does it sound roughly similar? I suspect that the answer is no, and I hope ECM releases a companion disc soon. The problem with a one-time gathering such as this is that the musicians do not have time to develop an understanding of one another, develop a common language, and spur one another to their best efforts. While the playing is fine, it mainly sounds hesitant, perhaps too a result of the constraints imposed by Mitchell's compositions/frameworks for improvisation. Only Part VIII really takes off into some unpredictable intensity. There are many other passages of lovely chamber music, and I'm sure that other listeners who will find this more compelling than I do.

GRACHAN MONCUR III – *INNER CRY BLUES*



Label: Lunar Module Records

Release Date: December 2007

Tracklist: G Train (for Duke Ellington); Inner City Blues; Hilda; For Pops (for Louis Armstrong); Blue Rondo (for Jackie McLean); Sonny's Back (for Sonny Rollins) – (i) Sonny's Back! (ii) Clifford Browning

Personel: Erik Jekabson: trumpet; Grachan Moncur III: trombone; Mitch Marcus: tenor sax; Ben Adams: vibraphone; Lukas Vesely: bass; Sameer Gupta: drums.

Grachan Moncur III is not as well-known as he should be, but has been one of the most important jazz musicians and composers around, particular in the 60s when he was signed to Blue Note records and appeared on such revelatory albums as those by Jackie McLean's 'Pianoless Quartet.' Somewhat forced into the avant-garde, after being pretty much black-balled for demanding the rights to his own music, he then went on to record with the likes of Archie Shepp, but, for me, it is in the way he exemplified the 'inside-outside' approach that his real importance lies.

This recent album came out of slightly unusual circumstances – Bay area vibraphone player Ben Adams posted a comment on Moncur's MySpace page back in 2006, to which Moncur responded with an invitation to play together. The result of this improbable collaboration, *Inner Cry Blues*, features homages to Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Jackie McLean, and Sonny Rollins – very much a case of going back to jazz roots, rather than exploring the vanguard area with which he is more commonly associated.

Like the Sonny Fortune album reviewed a few pages back, this is good, straightforward swinging music. The musical language spoken by the group synthesises elements from cool jazz and hard bop, largely dispensing with Moncur's post-bop/avant garde vocabulary. What results has a very different feel to Moncur's 60s Blue Note appearances – despite the title, which suggests raw emotion and the expression of persona feeling, the music itself is much more optimistic, more relaxed. Even the tracks dedicated to Moncur's late mother-in-law and to his daughter who died tragically at a young age show none of the bleakness of tracks like "Ghost Town"; on the contrary, there seems to be a strong element of warmth and hope in them. While this isn't necessarily a bad-thing, it does mean that the music lacks a certain tension and sense of musical exploration.

That said, the group's focus on a comfortable, unassuming organic melodic flow is attractive: Adams claims to be teaching his quintet to behave with the looseness of a trio, and for the most part, this comes through. In addition, the album incorporates some fetching new compositions, especially the title track (which sounds like a New Orleans funeral dirge) and the jaunty tune "Hilda."

Moncur seems to forgo the 'inside-out' approach on this one, instead settling for the 'inside' – but, after all, he went 'out' during his free jazz period, so he's entitled to come back 'in.' While this isn't nearly as compelling as his earlier music, it's probably not that helpful to constantly refer back to Moncur's earlier days: in its own right it's an attractive, straight-ahead jazz record – nothing more, nothing less.



DAVID MURRAY – *SACRED GROUND*

Label: Justin Time

Release Date: June 2007

Tracklist: Sacred Ground; Transitions; Pierce City; Banished; Believe in Love; Family Reunion; The Prophet of Doom

Personnel: David Murray: tenor sax, bass clarinet; Cassandra Wilson: vocals (tracks 1 & 7); Lafayette Gilchrist: piano; Ray Drummond: bass; Andrew Cyrille: drums.

David Murray has reunited his Black Saint Quartet, sans earthly departed pianist John Hicks, whose shoes are filled by the able Lafayette Gilchrist. Along with Ray Drummond on bass and Andrew Cyrille on drums, it's a fantastic lineup that on this album is also aided by the presence of Cassandra Wilson.

Ms. Wilson acts as the album's bookends, performing the opener and closer, singing words penned by the prolific Ishmael Reed. Reed also wrote the liner notes, and admits that upon being asked to write lyrics for Cassandra Wilson, at the ripe age of 68 and in awe of Ms. Wilson, all he could think was Wow! "Like some zit afflicted adolescent" (his words).

'Sacred Ground' sets a hushed backdrop for Wilson's sensuous vocal stylings. Along with her gorgeous voice, the message is at the forefront: "We've come back to claim our dearest legacy/we've come back to claim our very own/to you they're just a box full of bones/but to us they're our loved ones who shouldn't be left alone." Reed drew his

inspiration for Sacred Ground from a film about the banishment of thousands of American blacks from their homes between 1890 and 1930 in the South and Midwest; the instrumental track 4, 'Banished', is based upon the same source.

The sensitive balladry accompaniment that floats behind Wilson's lyrics during the verses morphs into a loose, freer mid section of the piece with Murray on bass clarinet. Lafayette Gilchrist is phenomenal on this track and throughout the album; it makes me wonder why his solo efforts haven't clicked more for me, as I've also enjoyed his playing on the other recent David Murray Quartet with strings album that was released a while back. Furthermore, when I saw the Murray Quartet here in Chicago a while back, Gilchrist was a highlight of what I otherwise found to be a quite lacklustre show. But I digress....

Wilson's vocals re-enter for a refrain that continues the upward trajectory of the piece, which ultimately coming to a peak before sliding back down to the song's original restrained dynamic, with a final verse by Cassandra. The band really nails the ballad feel and mood, which in a jazz setting is like nothing else in the world for me. Certainly a bold scene setter for the remainder of the album.

'Transitions' is a solid piece that typifies what I've come to expect of David Murray (which isn't necessarily a bad thing): a solid instrumental piece with a nice head, and then a form over which Murray blows with his liberal sense of time, phrasing, and singular approach to the horn. Like him or not, as has been said in previous discussions about the merits of David Murray, he has certainly created his own bag on the horn that is instantly identifiable.

This is as good a time as any to mention the fact that I love Andrew Cyrille's drumming. His feel, use of space, and sense of swing all really do it for me and I find myself honing in on his playing throughout the album. He plays an excellent solo in this track that lays bare his sense of melodicism on the drums.

'Pierce City' is a stand out track on the album, featuring Murray at his best, one of best solos I've heard from him on record; intense playing without sacrificing some dynamic interplay with the ensemble.

Utilizing the Greek mythological Cassandra as an inspiration for the lyrics, Ishmael Reed wrote the final track, 'The Prophet of Doom', which features Ms. Wilson singing over a straight blues form. It's a laid back feel that even features some finger snapping as Cassandra sings about her mythological namesake.

I think this is a great modern jazz album. It's not revolutionary in terms of innovation, but it's a fantastic recording in the idiom that has a strong message to go along with the great playing by the whole band. It will get a lot more mileage in my collection than Murray's previous release, *Waltz Again*, which was perhaps more novel but to my ears lacked some essential element that fuels longevity in listening.

(Review by Daniel Melnick, originally published at http://soundslope.com/vocab/david_murray)

MARK O' LEARY – *ON THE SHORE*

Label: Clean Feed

Release Date: August 2007

Tracklist: Staring at the Sun; Dancing with the wind; Morning / Harvest; Evening; Point Sketch; Vespers; Voices from the past; On the shore **Personnel:** Jeff Kaiser, John Fumo: trumpet; Mark O'Leary-electric guitar, 12 string acoustic guitars; Alex Cline: drums, percussion, shells, sticks, stones.

Guitarist Mark O'Leary's name may not be the first thing you look for when considering a new record – part of that may be due to his being based in Cork, Ireland, which is hardly the most well-known centre for left-field music in Europe. Nevertheless, he's worked prolifically over the past two years, releasing six albums in that time, none of which feature the same line-up (although, interestingly, all are trio records). As a further indication of his versatility and ability to experiment, he's played with everyone from Paul Bley to Sunny Murray, Han Bennink, Matthew Shipp, Henri Texier and electronics artists Gunter Muller, as well as performing Norwegian and Swedish folk music.

The line-up on this record departs from the trio format for a very quartet with a very unusual combination of instruments: O' Leary on guitar, Alex Cline on drums and a double trumpet front line consisting of Jeff Kaiser and John Fumo. Apart from Jacek Kochan's "Another Blowfish", with Eric Vloeimans and Piotr Wojtasik on trumpet, I'm not aware of any other quartet with a double trumpet front line.

The music on this record is light, spacious, elegant, ... I would almost say the musical equivalent of high quality champagne, very tasty, with bubbles, something to savour with every sip. The guitar plays a very prominent role on the whole CD, often with a very low tone, reminiscent of some of John Abercrombie's albums, but more avant-garde, more creative, with the two trumpets and the drums adding shades of sound that bring depth and sculptural relief to the music, even if they're pushed a little to the back in the sound editing, a nice touch which adds to the overall atmosphere.

The whole quartet is absolutely brilliant. Alex Cline's playing is precise, accurate, accentuating loosely, performing the difficult feat of drumming on music that is essentially without explicit rhythm. The two trumpets use every shade and sound their instruments can produce, in various intensities, volume changes and lengths, because there is mostly no melody to hear - texture, tonal changes and contrast is all there is, especially exemplified by the long title track.

O'Leary himself gets every possible sound out of his guitar as well, and whether it's plain acoustic, or one of the many effects on his electric guitar, his playing is not focused on the playing itself but on the musical moods he creates, and it's also coherent throughout the album, regardless of how he uses his instrument. O'Leary doesn't hesitate to push his foot switches once in a while, bringing scorching fusion-like solos, pushing the trumpets and the drums to high levels of intensity as in "Point Sketch", but most of the music is subdued, tentative, fragile, creating open-ended soundscapes, composed with skill and feeling, building layers of music to create a very distinct mood, which is nostalgic, sad, but also reverent, jubilant or mysterious at times. You can hear seagulls and whales, or even sirens, the surf in the distance, or lapping waves close-by, ... that's how evocative the music is without needing to try to imitate those sounds.

Most of it sounds too beautiful to be the result of spontaneous improvisation, too carefully crafted to have been left to chance, but then again, it sounds too open to be composed, and these are great musicians, so you can't tell. One could also argue whether this is jazz or not, but asking the question is irrelevant, and answering it even more. This is absolutely excellent music. That's the most important thing.

(Review by Stef Gijssels)

WILLIAM PARKER DOUBLE QUARTET – *ALPHAVILLE SUITE*

Label: Rogue Art

Release Date: 2007

Tracklist: Alphaville Main Theme; Journey to the End of the Night; Natasha's Theme; Interrogation; Alpha 60; Doctor Badguy; Oceanville Evening; Civilization of Light; Outlands; Natasha's Theme II

Personnel: Lewis Barnes: trumpet; Rob Brown: alto sax; William Parker: bass; Hamid Drake: drums; Mazz Swift: violin; Jessica Pavone: viola; Julia Kent, Shiau-Shu Yu: cello; Leena Conquest: vocals (on 'Natasha's Theme' & 'Natasha's Theme II').

The great thing about William Parker is that he doesn't stop looking for new approaches to music, as long as they're acoustic and based on genuine interplay between real musicians. On this CD he brings a double quartet, his usual band consisting of himself on bass, Rob Brown on alto sax, Lewis Barnes on trumpet and Hamid Drake on drums, augmented with Mazz Swift on violin, Jessica Pavone on viola, Julia Kent on cello and Shiau-Shu Yu on cello. Leena Conquest guests on vocals on "Natasha's Theme" and "Natasha's Theme 2". Or, if you want, a male quartet and a female quartet.

Like Matthew Shipp's tribute to Jean Genet on the French RogueArt label, this one is a tribute to and inspired by another great French piece of art, Jean-Luc Godard's movie "Alphaville". In this movie, the futuristic city Alphaville is dominated by the logic of computers and ruled by an evil scientist named Von Braun, who has outlawed love and self-expression. And "love and self-expression" are of course themes close to Parker's heart and they have permeated his career and art.



Above: an image from Jean Luc-Godard's film 'Alphaville', the inspiration for Parker's album.

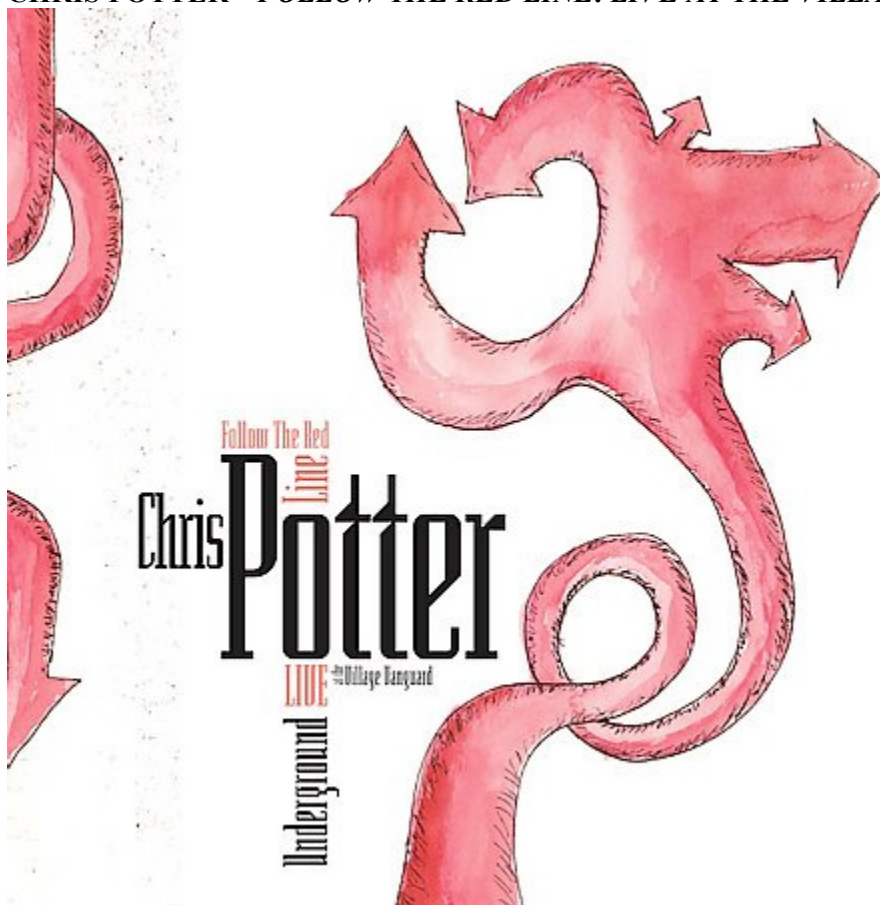
Adding the string quartet helps to evoke the music of the film itself, with the eerie tension and typical movie suspense full of romantic drama and sentimental outbursts. But the strings here are luckily more modern, more avant-garde, offering a

great contrast with the free jazz musicians, sometimes limiting themselves to pizzicato chattering in the background, sometimes driving heavy unisono lines accentuating the jazz solos, with an especially gloomy and menacing counterpoint in the long "Dr. Badguy".

The overall effect is utterly bizarre, creating a kind of busyness which is too much to grasp at once, because there is too much going on, but still in a coherent way, following its own logic. The jazz dominates, and it's great as you can expect from these artists and there are times, especially in the longer pieces that the strings let them do their thing, leaving some breathing space, but never for long : there they are again, to chase the jazz quartet forward, jab it in the sides, kick it back, emphasize it, play along in moments of frenzy, move it to weird territory, or offer shades and an overall darkness that is highly unusual, to say the least.

Without specifically saying that the string quartet would represent the cold futuristic logic of the evil scientist and the jazz band the proponents of love and free expression (or female vs male :-), at least the tension between good and bad and the overall mood of the film is well-captured by the concept of the double band. And the music is excellent to. Like Parker's "Requiem", this is one you should listen to often before you can appreciate it to the full. **(Review by Stef Gijssels)**

CHRIS POTTER – FOLLOW THE RED LINE: LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD



Label: Sunnyside **Release Date:** August 2007 **Tracklist:** Train; Arjuna; Pop Song # 1; Viva las Vilnius; Zea; Togo **Personnel:** Chris Potter: tenor sax, bass clarinet; Craig Taborn: Fender Rhodes electric piano; Adam Rogers: electric guitar; Nate Smith: drums.

For the last half century, the tenor saxophone has been the top dog in jazz, the instrument that carries the most heft in the community. It's the heavyweight voice that typically isn't cute or clever. Not many tenor saxophonists will settle for being coy.

Chris Potter, album-by-album and show-by-show over the last ten years, has made a bid for the tenor title. He has been playing with the best bandleaders (from Dave Holland to Steely Dan), and he has been leading his own potent groups. Though Potter does not possess a larger-than-life persona, he builds gargantuan solos with the personality of a freight train: slow at first, then surging and bold, and finally explosive and spectacular. Potter's band Underground is his most hard-hitting outfit, and this document of the band's tenure in the legendary Greenwich Village basement club bristles with daring and funk energy.

Follow the Red Line features not only Potter's tenor but also a fully integrated rhythm section: Craig Taborn's Fender Rhodes electric piano, Adam Rogers on electric guitar, and Nate Smith's drums. This is a band that could court cliché—an electric “fusion” band that integrates funk rhythms with jazz—and that would seem to be lacking an important tool: a bass player. But, in fact, the opposite is true. Under-ground is a band that pulses with invention. With Potter out front, the band is precisely the opposite of generic. Each player is pressed into varied service: Taborn plays bass lines as well as ripping chords, Rogers is both distorted and clean, choppy and legato, and Smith is polyrhythmic fallout—a dizzying clatter of arms and legs in flowing groove.

Even compared to the band's first studio outing from early 2006, this is a progression. While the tunes still begin with intelligently composed, carefully voiced arrangements, there is a boiling beneath the surface that rises quickly enough to the surface. On “Arjuna”, for example, the ensemble section bristles with Smith's nasty stickwork, then Taborn's solo starts at a simmer and starts to flare up as the punches of left-hand Rhodesplay is complicated by Rogers stuttering guitar. When Potter enters, it is predictably with his own stuttering ‘plosions of breath, adding another pointellistic layer to the polyrhythm. The solo climaxes in a series of serpentine rips that alternate with architectural steps through the harmony.

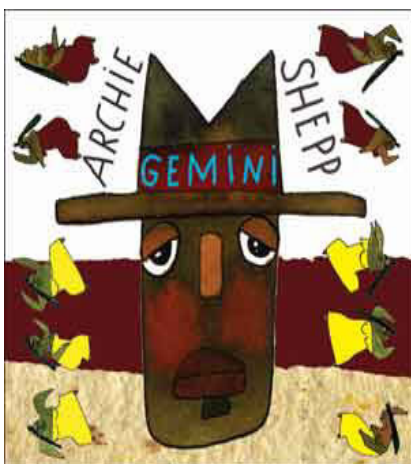
Equally impressive are the more consonant moments, such as the statement of melody on “Pop Song #1”, where a pleasant and inevitable tune is set amidst a flow of surprising chords. Rogers plays with a pungent simplicity, and Taborn patiently waits for each downbeat before playing his gospel-infused chords. On Potter's solo, however, the band gets into an improbably hot funk groove that seems to build off the basic guitar line. “Viva las Vinius” is first built off a single rhythm lick, and the band seems ready to ride the thing through the whole performance. It's even more of the treat, then, when Potter's solo begins in a slowed-down free time that *very* gradually builds from slow and quiet back to the full strength of the original groove.

It's an extra treat that *Follow the Red Line* allows Potter a long stretch for his outstanding sound on bass clarinet. Bass clarinet is a doublers specialty, of course, and inevitably gets jazz fans thinking about Eric Dolphy. So it's wonderful to hear Underground place the oddball horn in a Rhodes-and-guitar pop ballad on “Zea” and then allow it to begin “Togo” in a Bennie Maupin vibe, muttering from its lower register as the rhythm section slowly picks up on the percussive groove. This last tune eventually gives way to a one-chord jam groove (and a burning tenor solo) that suggests how

Potter's electric band ultimately converges with the likes of Medeski, Martin, and Wood on the one hand and class Sonny Rollins on the other.

The magic in *Red Line* is ultimately in the drama that each player brings to his solos, each of which builds like a scene from a Hitchcock film. Top honours, as so often, go to Taborn's versatile Rhodes playing. But they are Potter's fiendish tunes and his group conception. In a year that saw the passing of Michael Brecker, Potter seems to have emerged as a steely-toned tenor player who blends harmonic adventure with groove. It's not a question of talking about Potter as a Brecker successor—they're totally different players and, frankly, I think that Potter's range and imagination is wider. But it's a joy to hear this young master make a hard-edged, Breckeresque step forward, with what is a very fine record.

(Review by Will Layman)



ARCHIE SHEPP – *GEMINI*

Label: Archie Ball

Release Date: July 2007

Tracklist: CD ONE – 'The Reverse'. The Reverse (alternate version 1); Revolution (Mama Rose); Burning bright; Trippin'; Time stood still; Intertwining spirits; La manzana; Eva; Pannonica; The Reverse; The Reverse (alternate version 2); CD TWO – 'Live in Souillac' (2002). Hope Two; Call Him; Do you want to be saved; Ujaama; Rest Enough.

Personnel: Archie Shepp: tenor & soprano sax, voice; Tom McLung: piano; Wayne Dockery: bass; Steve McCraven: drums/ Guests (on 'The Reverse') – Stephane Guery: guitar; Chuck D: voice. DISC 2 – Shepp, with Amina Claudine Myers: piano, voice; Cameron Brown: bass; Ronnie Burrage: drums.

The first disc is a pretty ragbag collection of studio recordings, most notable for featuring Chuck D, lead vocalist of Public Enemy, and an eloquent and politically sensitive rapper whose concerns tie in with those of Shepp and the 60s 'New Thing'. After Shepp appeared in with Public Enemy at a press conference and concert they gave in Paris, he went to cut these tracks with Chuck at the studio. Unfortunately, they're pretty mediocre, with the rapper improvising some bland, pat lyrics about jazz history and how great Shepp is, over some uninspiring music. It doesn't seem to have been a particularly productive session: several alternate takes are included. Perhaps things would have been more successful if Shepp had tried to fit into a more directly hip-hop oriented context, as he's tried with his (unrecorded) Born Free Band, which features French rapper Vicelow and Jalal, of the Last Poets - although that's hardly a roaring success either.

Overall, I think it would be fair to say that Shepp is not the artist he once was; politically radical (to an extent) he may still be, but musically he's become increasingly conservative. That's not necessarily a problem: witness Anthony Braxton's treatment of Monk and Charlie Parker, toned down a bit from his avant-garde work, but with no compromise to artistic integrity, and absolutely no blandness. Shepp could be a pretty ferocious performer, if a bit erratic, and he could have perhaps found a happy medium between the avant-garde and the traditional stuff that he always seemed to want to lean towards: a little known trio record, taped in Montreux, called 'Steam', finds him ripping through standards, Monk tunes, and originals, without the extreme dissonances of

his free jazz work, but with all of its intensity. In fact, his affinities are less with the bebop that so many of the avant-garde jazzers came from (Dolph, Braxton - to a certain degree, Ornette, Jimmy Lyons especially), and more with earlier styles - the vocal extravagance and impishness of Fats Waller, the tenor tones of Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins, marching bands, old-style balladry (with a distinctive twist). In his best work, he manages to balance invention and innovation with such tendencies, producing beautiful performances like his impressionistic smears on Duke Ellington's 'In a Sentimental Mood', from the 1965 album 'On this Night.'

More recently, though, the increasing traditionalism seems to have diluted, rather than rooted his music, and it's hard to find many epiphanies in what he does now, which is all a bit samey (whereas before, the criticism could have been that he was perhaps too erratic, too multifaceted). The bands he surrounds himself with are always efficient, if not in the absolute top-rank of jazz improvisers - people like Kenny Werner, Santo di Briano, Tom McLung, Ronnie Burrage, Cameron Browne - and there is something of a feeling of coasting (which also crept into the 70s and 80s music of Pharoah Sanders). For a man who had so much potential, to have become, essentially, a middleweight posing as a heavyweight, as a result of past glories, is a bit of a shame.

All that said, the second disc, recorded live in 2002, is very listenable, and one of the few opportunities we have of getting to hear the band he's been playing with for the past few years. 'The New Archie Shepp Quartet', on the Italian Pao records, also documents this group, and manages to make something fresh out of 'Mama Rose', one of the most over-performed pieces in his repertoire (it's on disc one of 'Gemini', and numerous other albums). However, it's pretty hard to get hold of, even online. For this reason, then, the live portion of 'Gemini' serves a useful documentary function as much as anything.

Shepp's quartet plays what I suppose could be best characterised as post-bop, with ex-AACM pianist Amina Claudine Myers adding a distinctive gospel flavour (and sharing a vocal duet with Shepp on 'Call Him' - her voice is very passable, if not the most distinctive; Shepp's, on the other hand, as people who regularly buy his records will be able to tell you, is distinctive but not really passable (unless you're in the mood)). You could maybe call it a 'primitive' style, and, whatever its weaknesses, it's got spirit; plenty of blues holler and guttural roar with heavy-vibrato - a bit like his tenor playing, I suppose, but not really to my taste.

Taken as a whole, the album offers no real revelations. I quite enjoy it when the mood takes me, but it's obvious that this is not up there with the music of Shepp's heyday. For a more interesting example of his recent work, check out 'Kindred Spirits', a recording with African percussion group Dar Gnowa, also on Archie Ball
(Review by David Grundy)

SOIL AND 'PIMP' SESSIONS – *PIMPOINT*

Label: Brownswood

Release Date: July 2007

Tracklist: Dawn; A.I.E.; Makuroke; Mashiroke; We Want More!!!!; Zambezi; Red Clay; Hype of Gold; Pluto; The Party; Funky Goldman; The Slaughter Suite; Scales; Sahara

Personnel: Tabu Zombie: trumpet; Motoharu: sax; Josei: piano; Akita Goldman: bass; Midorin: drums; Shacho: agitator.



Following on from last year's last superb 'Pimp Master', Soil and Pimp look to be gaining a bit of recognition – largely, one would suspect, due to the advocacy of Radio 1 DJ Gilles Peterson (this comes out, in the UK, on his own Brownswood label). Still, their releases are still pretty hard to get hold of, and the whole Japanese jazz movement of which they are a part is only gradually emerging from being an underground scene (artists like Quasimode and Sleepwalker, who create music with the same ethos, don't have much of a profile outside Japan at all, or so it seems to me). I suspect that this movement will run its course fairly soon, and be no

more than a passing trend – I'm not sure that there are that many places it can go, or wants to go – but, for the moment, it is a true breath of fresh air, blown into the stultifying worlds of inhabited by the sort of unadventurous singers adored by Michael Parkinson, or the bebop/postbop that seems to be pretty much *de rigeur* on the jazz festival circuit, here in the UK.

In a moment, I'll get onto what it is that makes Japanese jazz, and Soil and Pimp in particular, so refreshing, but before that, I'll note that this is now S & P's fifth full release (not including singles/EPs, and the like), and it slightly lacks the fire that their previous albums had, with less compelling performances and tunes. I suspect that what will happen is that, as with the Bad Plus (who also released an album this year, the so-so 'Prog'), or EST's interminably samey albums, what was initially a fresh and exciting concept, will become tired through overuse, losing its appeal because it is never really moved on or developed.

Nevertheless, thought the rot may be just beginning to set in on 'Pimpoint', it doesn't have too much of an adverse effect – this is still immensely enjoyable music, and S & P's gimmicks are still fun and involving enough not to seem too much like gimmicks. Their music is both retro and modern, treating the jazz of the past in a genuinely innovative way. Basically, the group is set up as a standard quintet – sax, trumpet, piano, bass, and drums, with the occasional presence of 'agitator' Shacho, the club promoter who initially brought the group together, and whose contribution seems to involve whipping the crowd up or making random interjections through a megaphone, and standing around smoking cigars in the band's video. They play bebop, but at twice the speed, to create a 'rock' feel without having to subsume jazz content to the simplified harmonic language and boring clichés of rock music (as with the dire, and much over-praised Acoustic Ladyland).

All the musicians are fantastic players, and, on this album, the sax soloing of Motoharu in particular stands out. His rough-hewn tone is several notches down from the gruff screaming of a Brotzmann or the sanctified hollers of a David S. Ware; there's perhaps a bit of Jackie McLean's sourness in there, maybe even an echo of David

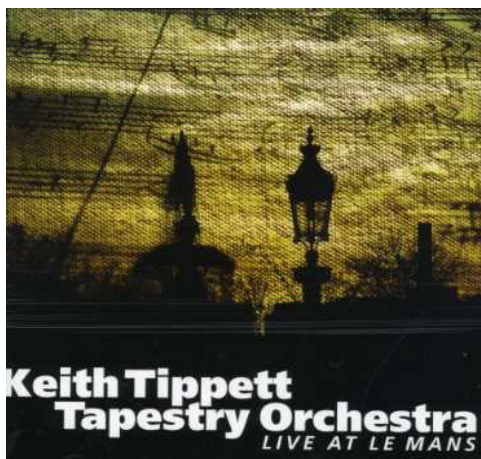
Sanborn in the combination of a hard-edged sound with a populist feel, but Motoharu's style is distinctively his own.

Much of the excitement of the music comes from the fact that it is delivered at such a dazzling speed, and variety isn't too much of an issue when they can consistently keep octane levels so high. Live, they must be a fantastic prospect – far more involving than the sort of gig where the regulars sit around head-nodding over yet another Charlie Parker-esque solo on some jazz standard! In terms of atmosphere, the aim is clearly more for the euphoria of a club environment – the wonder is that this is achieved without compromising on solos, the odd dissonance, or the use of jazz vocabulary.

On 'Pimpoint', though, they seem to be trying to broaden out the sound a little here, and that actually makes things less, rather than more interesting. At times there's a more funky, James Taylor Quartet-esque feel, which may please some – although I'm not sure acid jazz is really S & P's strongpoint. 'Funky Goldman,' as the title might indicate, sees them opt for an easy funk groove, soft electric piano, and even the slightly surreal touch of vocodered vocals: for the latter as much as anything, it reminded me of one of Herbie Hancock's dodgy late 70s 'disco' records like 'Feets, Don't Fail Me Now,' or 'Sunlight.'

Thankfully that mis-step is limited to just one track, but when they try the typical S & P approach on Freddie Hubbard's 'Red Clay', it does rather show up the essential one-dimensionality of their approach (which the novelty of treating the trumpet with echo effects doesn't really redeem). I know it's not what they're trying to do, but I do sometimes long for just a sprinkling more sensitivity and depth – true, they do throw in a few moments of some delicacy and they can be quite subtle and waltz-like ('Hype of Gold'), but such respite doesn't last for long. Oh well, notwithstanding a rather lovely version of 'Mo Better Blues' on their last album, I guess ballads ain't what they're about...

What they are about, though, is exemplified on the superb fourth piece, 'Mashiroke', which feels 'slightly Latin', as Roland Kirk might have put it. For sheer joyful exuberance it's hard to beat, and I for one can't resist the combination of a great melody, a propulsive, locked-in rhythm section and soloists who know precisely what buttons to press and when. Jazz hasn't sounded as convincingly like party music since the 40s or 50s, I suspect, and, in making that happen once more, S & P have succeeded where so many dire fusion/ smooth jazz efforts have failed. So enjoy this for the unabashed entertainment it provides. **(Review by David Grundy)**



KEITH TIPPETT – *FIRST WEAVING: LIVE AT LE MANS*

Label: Red Eye Music

Release Date: June 2007

Tracklist: (Disc 1) - First Thread; Second Thread; Third Thread; Fourth Thread; (Disc 2) - Fifth Thread; Sixth Thread; Seventh Thread

Personnel: Keith Tippett: piano; Julie Tippetts, Maggie Nicols, Vivien Ellis: voice; Paul Dunmall, Simon Picard, Larry Stabbins: tenor sax; Lee Goodall, Elton Dean, Gianluigi Trovesi: alto sax; Pino Minafra, Gethin Liddington, Jim Dvorak, Mark Charig: trumpet; Paul Rutherford, Malcolm Griffiths, Dave Amis: trombone; Oren Marshall: tuba; Paul Rogers: bass; Tony Levin, Louis Moholo-Moholo: drums

There has been a tendency among jazz writers of recent times to sideline musicians like Keith Tippett, and perhaps even snigger at them behind their expensively gloved fingers; 2007, and he still thinks that free improvisation and rubbing wine glasses together constitutes the way forward – after all, it's so old hat, isn't it, all that revolution and unity talk, it's so early seventies, all a bit of a childish frippery (pun intended), quite out of keeping with the happy and fulfilled society we have now (i.e. that this sort of thing was fine with Vietnam but makes us feel awkward in times of Iraq).

Or, as with Scott Walker or Kate Bush or any other musician of genuine worth, you could argue that Keith Tippett has simply pursued and developed his singular multidimensional line as rigorously and generously as possible. While the bulk of his work in recent years has concentrated on his solo piano improvisations/compositions, or his long-standing free jazz quartet Mujician, he has never stopped developing his ideas, and the comparative lack of releases from his larger ensembles has inevitably been due to economics rather than unwillingness.

For the last decade or so his Tapestry Orchestra has been his large ensemble of choice; he burst onto the scene in 1970 amid much curious publicity with the gigantic Centipede (100 legs = 50 musicians, although 55 players are listed on the published recording of *Septober Energy* and live performances would swell the numbers up even further), an assemblage of all the musicians with whom he was working at the time, that glorious time without boundaries or genre creeds, so that groups like Soft Machine, King Crimson, Nucleus, Patto and the Blossom Toes are represented either in greater part or in full, plus most of the British and South African New Thing contingents with whom Tippett was playing regularly and many others besides. While essentially an unwieldy beast – on the *Septober Energy* album there are among the personnel three drummers, six bassists, eleven saxophonists and a full classical string section – and while *Septober Energy* itself can now be viewed as a brave but only partially coherent sequence of “events,” it, along with the near concomitant *Escalator*, helped set my ideas of music in motion, and watching them in performance at the London Lyceum, aged seven, is an experience I have still not forgotten.

Seven years later, at the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, my parents and I saw his next big band, Ark, a far more manageable 22-strong ensemble (the name stems from the fact that there were two of each instrument in its line-up), performing his new four-part suite *Frames: Music For An Imaginary Film*. At the height of post-punk, here was an unashamed extension – not a throwback, but an extension – of 1967 ideals, full of drones, incantations and occasional outbursts of violence as well as surprisingly straightforward post-Ellington jazz voicings, sloppy in the Christian Wolff/Carla Bley sense, but airtight when it needed to be. The subsequent Ogun double album – like *Septober Energy*, still available on CD – is a work of unalterable but very touchable beauty.

Tapestry was formed in the nineties, and the 2CD set *Live At Le Mans* which has just been released was recorded in 1998. In certain circles this performance has been spoken of with a sense of awe comparable to Mingus at UCLA in '65, but Tippett has until now been resolute about not releasing it; the idea was to get the band into the studio, smooth out the rougher compositional edges of the extended work (*First Weaving*) and put down a definitive recording, but this being an era of the coldest rationalism, economics again ruled this out of the question – as indeed, and far more sadly, did the passing of Tippett's first saxophonist of choice, Elton Dean, early last year from

complications arising from heart and liver disease, not yet sixty; and I suspect that this may have been the decisive factor in the performance's eventual release.

While there are undeniably rough edges to the structure of *First Weaving*, both concept and performance are so strong on this record that it simply becomes a joy to hear Tippett heading and directing a large group in the way only he can. This is a comparatively compact twenty-piece line-up, though its resources are so skilfully marshalled that frequently the orchestra sounds as though double that number are playing, without causing the occasional logjams to which Centipede, even at their most powerful, were prone. There is also, as is similarly characteristic of Tippett, a decided focus on the orchestra as one unit rather than a collection of soloists since there are very few soloists throughout the work and quite a lot of collective improvisation work by individual sections, or duets and trios by various members.

Always a fan of Mingus, Tippett nevertheless catches the unwary listener off guard practically from the beginning of the "First Thread" where, after some call and response between the three singers and the two drummers (Louis Moholo and Tony Levin; now that's what I call a battalion) – the singers uttering "ka-ta ka-ta" like a happier Fuckhead sample from *The Drift*, the drummers responding with stiff military rolls – the band launches into a joyful gospel vamp (very "Better Git Hit In Your Soul") over which we have two ecstatic duets, by saxophonists Lee Goodall and Simon Picard, and then by Gethin Liddington (a student of Tippett's who is aligned to the F-Ire Collective which also spawned Polar Bear, Acoustic Ladyland et al) on trumpet and trusty veteran Malcolm Griffiths on trombone, deliciously sliding over each other's smears like sheets of chocolate satin.

Then the mood darkens for the "Second Thread," one of Tippett's great, slowly escalating incantations; over low, doubtful horns, the singers intone Julie Tippetts' unrepentantly spiritual lyrics (memes like "Overpowering" and "Overwhelming" gradually mutating into "Oh! Forgiving" and "Oh! Relief"). Then Maggie Nicols is left alone, over a brooding improv trio of flute (Goodall), bass clarinet (Gianluigi Trovesi) and saxello (Dean), initially offering a disturbing mutation of "Lili Marlene" before dissolving into her sotto voce flurries of contained ecstasy.

The Third and Fourth Threads are very closely linked; both take Mingusian post-bop melodic/rhythmic heads as their starting point before developing in other unexpected ways. In the Third Thread this leads to a furious debate between three snarling tenors (Picard, Dunmall and Larry Stabbins) which is eventually resolved by a beautiful, balladic alto solo from Elton. The waltz fragment glimpsed in this section (reminiscent of "Don't Be Afraid, The Clown's Afraid Too") is developed more fully and sinisterly in the Fourth Thread, as various band members, including Dunmall on a squealing set of Northumbrian bagpipes, scribble and growl intensely in front of the backdrop; but this too leads (following a sighing duet between Marc Charig's cornet and Paul Rutherford's trombone) into a lyrical ballad section with a fantastic alto solo from Trovesi, the Italian perfectly capturing the sugar/poison blend which seemed to be a characteristic of the Dean/Pukwana/Osborne/Warleigh/Watts school of turn-of-the-seventies Brit improv alto playing.

The Fifth Thread, and the second CD, begin with an astonishing prayer for peace, written and lead sung by Julie Tippetts – and how this remarkable woman has suffered for following her husband into the world of contemporary improvised music; even now her activities arouse derisive reactions from cowering nonentities like Will Hodgkinson, side-sniping in broadsheets about sixties girl singers who ended up somewhere different,

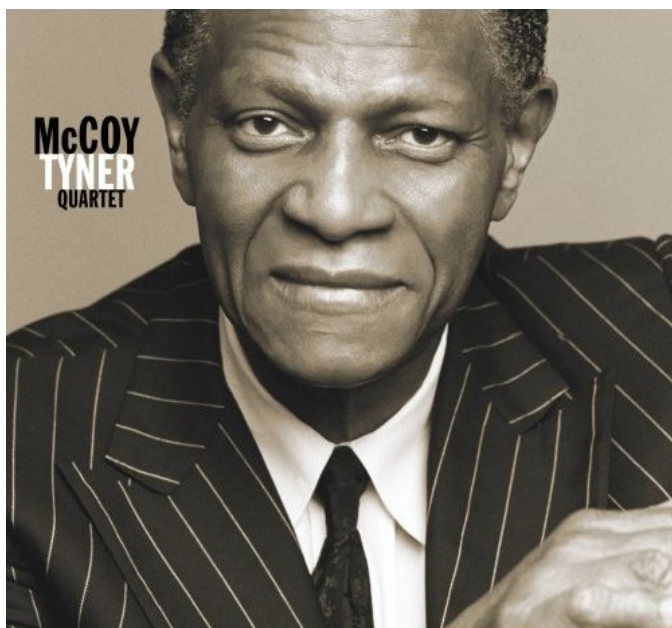
eagerly spoonfeeding the showbiz demographic necessary to preserve the façade that process and destination do not matter in music, as if they weren't indispensable to an ideal society – “Almighty...” the trio quietly sing, “hear my breath on the wind...I can't...” (meaningful pause) “...let you go.” It is breathtaking and transfers into the world of the holy when, as the trio begin to improvise, the rest of the orchestra begin to play wind-up music boxes; a forest, a blessing of an orchard of wind chimes underlying carefully controlled harmonies of which Brian Wilson would (if he'd followed up, or been allowed to follow up, the implications of “George Fell Into His French Horn”) have been rightly proud.

Towards the end the singers move into a medieval roundelay, which itself provides the segue for the dazzling Sixth Thread, which opens with a merry estampie sung by the third member of the trio, the great Vivien Ellis, in tandem with Oren Marshall's tuba, even though its merriment is darkly ambiguous (“Scattering nightly a dream to the sleeper/Gathering lightly, she leans to the Reaper”) as her song is interrupted by crosscurrents of brass familiar from the beginning of the fourth section of *Frames*. The music then explodes into sterling, glistening beams of controlled chaos, which somehow manages to encompass a 500 mph trumpet solo by Pino Minafra – played through a megaphone (!) – which sounds like the ghost of Mongezi Feza trying to regain contact with Earth, an utterly beyond-bizarre vocal breakout into “Let's Face The Music And Dance,” a grumbling stomach of a conversation between the trombone section and Marshall's tuba, dancehall chants of “Seven Eleven” and squeals, honks and howls aplenty. Throughout the double-drum approach is shown to work with brilliant force as Moholo and Levin hammer away as though typing with scythes.

After that Tippett can only tie the composition up, and Seventh Thread is perhaps the section which could have done with a little more work. Its opening promise of a straight 12-bar blues is alluring, but never one to rest for long, the orchestra immediately gives way to a gulping and roaring improvisation by the trumpet section, sounding as though they are hauling themselves up by their own rusty pulleys. Then the orchestra returns for some more all-out freeplay before Paul Rogers' bass drags everyone back to the original opening statement of “ka-ta, ka-ta” and Edinburgh Castle drum rolls and we get a brief moment of collective swing before Tippett ironically – or possibly unironically – signs off with the old Count Basie flourish.

The audience goes wild, even if I suspect that the Seventh Thread was a work still somewhat in progress in 1998; I wouldn't have minded a few more Brotherhood-ish shoutouts at the end. But *Final Weaving* is a tremendous listening experience, and the best illustration of the compelling power of Tippett's music is the fact that so many of the members of Tapestry were also members of Centipede over a quarter of a century previously; there is an exceptional loyalty at work here which must prove heartwarming for the composer. Tippett's remains a very singular but unbreakably collective compositional vision; I am not sure whether *Final Weaving* will alter my outlook on music so thoroughly as its predecessors did, but it is unmissable. As ever, Tippett's sleevenote signs off with his lifelong motto: “May music never become just another way of making money” – and he does so with such a forgiving generosity that you know instinctively and instantly that it is Jools Holland's fault, not his, that Tapestry haven't appeared on Friday night BBC2. At least, not yet.

(Review by Marcello Carlin: originally posted at 'The Church of Me' blog - http://cookham.blogspot.com/2007_07_01_archive.html)



**McCOY TYNER QUARTET -
*McCOY TYNER QUARTET***

Label: McCoy Tyner Music (Half Note Music)

Release Date: September 2007

Tracklist: Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit; Mellow Minor; Sama Layuca; Passion Dance; Search for Peace; Blues on the Corner; For All We Know.

Personnel: Joe Lovano: tenor sax; McCoy Tyner: piano; Christian McBride: bass; Jeff 'Tain' Watts: drums.

Additional Information: Recorded live at Yoshi's, Oakland, California, Dec. 30-31st 2006 (broadcast on NPR's 'Toast of the Nation', New Year's Eve 2006). The first release on Tyner's own record label.

Tyner's style now is still recognisably his own, though it has undergone various subtle evolutions over the years - from the modal accompaniment which alternately rooted and energised John Coltrane's Classic Quartet, to the massive, percussive, African-influenced sound of his albums as a leader in the 1970s, to today's more gospelly, churchy tone. What's maintained throughout is that oiling, roiling, and cresting feel he creates from the piano, using it to provide great waves and bursts of sound.

As you can see, it's easy to use natural metaphors to describe his way of playing, and I'm going to go for another now. What most people have come to expect, and love, in his playing, is what I call the 'thunder and lightning approach': tinkling, lightning-fast and scintillatingly melodic right hand runs up and down the higher register of the keyboard, commented on by with sequences of thunderous left hand chords, which alternately create tension and release, discord and resolution.

On this latest album, though, there's a slight move away from that: instead, we get a much chunkier sound, with both hands often playing just chords, rather than the juxtaposition of these in the left hand with the linear approach in the right-hand. It's almost like Brubeck in his heyday in its thickness – though it doesn't really sound anything like Brubeck, of course. Another change is that Tyner skimps a bit on the almost Rachmaninov-like lyricism that usually pervades his solo piano playing, which is a shame, as no one else really dares to play with that floridity nowadays (it's all about sober, dignified restraint (Brad Mehldau) or spikiness (Ethan Iversen, Matthew Shipp, Lafayette Gilchrist)).

The music as a whole is fairly patient in its development. Maybe Tyner's taking things a bit slower now: rather than rushing right in and sustaining peaks of intensity for minutes at a time, he builds to climaxes. He has been in ill-health recently, so that's perfectly understandable – compare how thin and drawn he looks on the title cover with the fairly rotund, jocular figure of around 10 years before - so it's understandable. Still, I did admit to feeling a slight pang at the slight diminishment of energy, although the climaxes, when they come, are exhilarating, and this more considered approach has its own rewards, teasing out the joy of the chord changes and tunes rather than using them as springboards for consistently high-energy improv.

The group he's assembled is a strong one. Starting from the rhythm section, McBride, whose profile seems to have dipped slightly (though, of course, he's still the bassist of choice for many, and one of the best around), is typically strong. Jeff Tain Watts is not the most obvious choice to play with McCoy, but, while his drumming never deviates very much from providing straight rhythmic beats and patterns, he's perfectly capable of dropping some Elvin-Jones cymbal crashes at appropriate points to keep things nicely energetic.

This was Joe Lovano's second date with an octogenarian pianist released in 2007 (the other being 'Kids,' a duet album with Hank Jones), and he is on excellent form. Buoyed, no doubt, by the ecstatic New Years' crowd at Yoshi's, he's much more fiery than he has been in recent years, and this makes a nice contrast to his lovely, intimate rapport with Jones. Inevitably, there are traces of Coltrane, but his playing is alternately more tart and tender - half-way between the gruffness of Pharoah Sanders and the hardness of Michael Brecker. A gruff vocalised tone even comes in at times – he's tended to go more for elegance and precision recently – so it makes a nice change to hear him spin out some down and dirty phrasing on his smear-filled solo from 'Blues on the Corner.' Most of all, Lovano sounds like he's enjoying himself - one of the best-known players in today's jazz mainstream, he can afford to take a few risks, to let his hair down, and still sound completely self-assured and polished.

The tunes are all familiar from Tyner's previous work: perhaps his most catchy composition, 'Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit', which advances over a rollicking bass line, the wonderful Latin-tinged groover 'Sama Lacuya' (perhaps the record's standout track), and three tracks from his 1968 Blue Note album 'The Real McCoy'. Nevertheless, it never feels like tired old ground, and some of the performances feel like re-interpretation rather than re-hashing. 'Blues on the Corner' is the prime example, stretched out from its brisk 5 minute treatment as the closer on 'The Real McCoy' for a more luxurious 10 minute version which really emphasises the blues elements (especially during Christian McBride's solo). Overall, this is a fine, if not exceptional record, and will surely be enjoyed by a large proportion of Tyner's many fans. **(Review by David Grundy)**

MATTHEW SHIPP – *PIANO VORTEX*

Label: Thirsty Ear

Release Date: 2007

Tracklist: Piano Vortex; Key Swing; The New Circumstance; Nooks and Corners; Sliding Through Space; Quivering with Speed; Slips Through the Fingers; To Vitalize.

Personnel: Matthew Shipp: piano; Joe Morris: bass; Whit Dickey: drums

Shipp was clearly one of the most important musicians of the 90s, both as a leader and as pianist in one of the great jazz groups, the David S. Ware Quartet, and he remains a man who produces challenging, thought-provoking, and above all *intelligent* music. Some may quibble at his experiments with electronics ('jazztronica'), pre-programmed beats, dubbing, hip-hop, and the like – and I don't think anything would claim them as completely successful, despite their moments of interest – but it is in the field of purely acoustic jazz music that his talent really lies, and he demonstrates that to the full here. The format helps– the piano trio (which seems to be coming into vogue again, what with EST, Tord Gustavsen, The Bad Plus, and all the rest of them selling albums at the top of

the jazz charts) really allows his voice to shine through, without distractions, without unnecessary embellishments.

This is not his first trio record: he's previously cut 'Circular Temple' with William Parker and Whit Dickey, and 'Multiplication Table' with Parker and Susie Ibarra, but this one is probably the most accessible of them (though that should not imply a lowering of standards, by any means). Joe Morris, equally adept on guitar, as demonstrated on the rather fine 'Rebus' with Ken Vandermark and Luther Gray, also out in 2007, is here feature on bass, and Whit Dickey once more takes drum-kit duties. The emphasis is on Shipp, as soloist and composer, but there's a pleasingly interactive, empathetic feel too – 'locked-in' would be an appropriate well-worn cliché to use, though there's a feeling of looseness and freedom as well.

There are elements of blues and swing on the record, as well as more romantic moments, but the structures and the interplay are definitely free jazz. For all the sense that the musicians are in control at all times, there's still a feel of openness and possibility, a preponderance of inventive quick-thinking and of surprising twists and turns taken by the various performances. The title track clearly defines this approach: yes there is clearly defined rhythm, the bass does walk, and the drums play a steady pattern, but Shipp manages to avoid a theme statement as such – no head-solos-head for him. Even if what he plays is melodic and mostly within the usual scales, this means there's no comforting point of reference: you have to make the effort to go out there with the pianist, as he adeptly creates slight patterns but leaves them somewhere in mid-air as soon as he's played them, in order to pursue new ideas. It's in such an approach that some of the most exciting contemporary jazz is being made: an awareness of tradition – sometimes an explicit acknowledgment of it – and an adventurousness that both comes from that tradition and transcends it, in a quest for new and fertile ground for musical exploration and experimentation.

For all that, Shipp can be as bluesy as it gets: the second track, 'Keyswing' is the closest he's ever come to mainstream jazz, 'To Vitalize' is a non-traditional reading of what is in essence a boppish tune, and 'Slips Through The Fingers' is almost romantic, but, on the whole, as its title might indicate, 'Piano Vortex' foregrounds the exploratory approach. Standout tracks include 'Sliding Through Space', with its eerie arco bass work, and thundering, menacing chords in the piano, almost cinematic in nature, creating suspense and restrained tension. 'Quivering With Speed' then expands on this tension, with Morris and Dickey propulsing the music forward, pushing Shipp into what feels like unmapped territory.

And that's the great thing about this music. It's accessible, in the sense that the trio uses known lyrical, melodic and rhythmic concepts to guide them along to some new places, but it never compromises. The accessibility makes the journey lighter, but no less interesting, and it's the fascinating journey that 'Piano Vortex' offers which really makes it stand out, even if no final destination has been found. After all, you could argue that such records as these which don't necessarily reach any obvious endpoint avoid complacency and keep both listeners and musicians on their toes. And that's something much needed at a time when jazz often risks sinking into apathy, into an indifferent rehashing of the old or a misguided attempt to seem 'relevant' by engaging with the new, at the expense of the elements which make this genre so great in the first place. All hail

Shipp, Morris and Dickey, then, for sticking to their guns and producing this absorbing music. (Review by David Grundy)



VARIOUS ARTISTS - FREE JAZZ.ORG SAMPLER, VOL. 2

Label: whi-music **Release Date:** Sept 2007

Tracklist: (DISC 1) Spark Trio – Tidal Wave; Berenson/Barnum/Marconi - Staring it Right in the Eyes; Wright/Bailley - Philadelphia 2/06; Marc Edwards & Slipstream Time Travel - Ion Storm; Dan Brunkhorst – Abraham; End Times Trio - Unexpected Explosions in a Midwest Suburb; Barry Chabala - Oswald Contemplates His Existence; Carey/Khoury - Untitled Improvisation/March 7, 2003.

(DISC 2) Phil Hargreaves - The End of the Street; Lee Tusman/Voodooartist - Earsplode Dos; Massimo Magee – Dual Emission; Mittimus: Nothing is Really Free Now, is It?; Padma Sound System - Cubist Monastic Trio; Grass Hair Duo - GHD24Feb07-3; Glenn Weyant - Bite Me WalMart (Suite Excerpt); Fire and Flux – An Aphorism on Time.

Personnel: (DISC ONE) (1) Ras Moshe – Tenor Sax; Matt Lavelle – Trumpet; Todd Capp – Drums; (2) Adam Berenson – Piano; Scott Barnum – Bass; Bill Marconi – Drums/Percussion; (3) Jack Wright - Sax; Alban Bailley – Guitar; (4) James Duncan – Trumpet; Ras Moshe – Saxophone; Tor Snyder – Electric Guitar; Marc Edwards – Drums; (5) Dan Brunkhorst – Slide guitar, machines; (6) Frank Trompeter – Alto/Tenor/ Soprano Saxophone; Mark Schwartz – Guitar and Preparations; Richard Gilman-Opalsky – Drums and Percussion; (7) Barry Chabala – guitar; (8) Mike Carey – Bass Clarinet; Mike Khoury – Violin; (DISC TWO) (9) Phil Hargreaves - Found sounds, Cello, Soprano Sax and Voice; (10) Lee Tusman - circuit-bent kid's toy guitar processed and recorded through Ableton Live; (11) Massimo Magee – Tenor Sax, Amplifier, Homemade instrument #1 and recorder; (12) Mike Yarrish – Upright Bass; Matt Sekel – Guitar; (13) Heidi Wilson Sax, Aryen Hart Vocals & Electronics, Yeshe Dorje Balophon & treatments; (14) Dan Pell - drums, Heath Watts - soprano sax; (15) Glenn Weyant – Kestrel 920 and Piano; (16) Benjamin Kates – Alto Sax; Richard Gilman-Opalsky – Drums and Percussion

Additional Information: Both samplers are available as MP3 downloads at <http://www.freejazz.whi-music.co.uk/>. CD copies are available on request, and may be purchased from some of the artists at their concerts. Cover art by Glenn Weyant and Phil Hargreaves.

Freejazz.org is a discussion website (no prizes for guessing what's discussed there!) whose regular contributors include a number of musicians. In 2004, it was suggested that they ought to produce a sampler of their work, which duly came out on Phil Hargreave's whi-music label (turn back for a review of his album with Glenn Weyant, 'Friday Morning Everywhere'). Three years later, the second instalment came along: a double album this time, with longer tracks. Once more, files are made available as free MP3 downloads, or on physical CDs if requested.

The provenance of this release raises interesting questions about the role of the internet, which also arose in 2007 with Maria Schneider's highly acclaimed 'Sky Blue', released through the artistshare website (where profits are plunged back into the production of more albums), or with musicians, such as Henry Grimes, who make self-

produced work available on their websites, rather than going through record companies, and thus get to reap the rewards of their labours themselves. Phil Hargreaves had this to say about the first sampler, on freejazz.org: “it's been a success, I would say, and the fact that it continues to be of interest is good as well: a CD would have faded into the back catalogue by now, but the web keeps it all alive.”

It's necessarily a varied collection, considering the contributors, brought together by the internet, and it suggests the possibilities of technology (as illustrated on the cover by the fusing of a computer motherboard with an aerial view of Angkor Wat in Cambodia). Indeed, as well as more traditional acoustic free jazz (mostly small groups – sax/drum duos, piano trios), much of the material on the sampler is more in line with contemporary experiments in electronic music. Whether it reflects the state of free jazz as such, as its title seems to suggest, is another matter. Of course, this is not necessarily a problem: despite the title of the website, not all the contributors produce music in that genre, even if it is within the scope of their interests.

Several of the pieces are pretty much straight free jazz: the first piece, by the Spark Trio, starts off with tough-toned solo saxophone engaged in Brotzmanesque overblowing, before drums and a curiously quavery, almost parodic trumpet come in for some hard blowing, eventually ending up on a melodic phrase, stroking it a few times, and ending with a drum solo. There's nothing wrong with it as such, although I can't help feeling (as I've felt with some of Brotzmann's recent work) that there's only so far you can go with this stuff, and that it ends up repeating itself. It feels – dare I say it? – like it's reached a creative dead-end, banging its dissonant head against a wall with no way out: the fiercely burning flame that was being grasped in the early days of this music has dwindled somewhat to become more of a glow. Indeed, that reservation is something I also feel about the other free jazz tracks on the record: Grass Hair Duo, with its clear debt to Coltrane and Ali's Interstellar Space, or the closer, a very brief and furious piece from Fire and Flux.

As Sonny Simmons frequently says, perhaps you need a dose of old-fashioned melody as well – after all, Ayler started off with simple, hummable heads before launching off into the stratosphere. I think the main problem, though, is that what was initially radical and exciting has now become familiar, just another style, like the jazz genres it initially reacted against. I found it hard to resist the idea that I'd heard all this before – albeit, under different names, on different albums, and from different times – that it was just treading over the same old ground. Free music was supposed to be about breaking new ground, breaking stultifying norms – yet maybe it's become its own stultifying norm. It should be noted that I am NOT trying to get at the artists – God knows they need exposure, and the music they make is not going to make them much money in today's consumerist world, where anything 'difficult' seems to be automatically discarded as 'rubbish.' But I have to be honest in expressing my thoughts, and I do feel somewhat uneasy.

More interest was raised by the pieces which try to do something a little different, such as the second track, by a piano trio whose abstract and angular explorations recall some of Matthew Shipp's work, or the electronic atmospheres of Dan Brunkhorst's 'Abraham', full of beats and bobs, with a melancholy accordion sound wheezing away, drifting in and out of the texture. Padma Sound System take this more measured, downbeat feel even further on their ambient, almost new-agey 'Cubist Monastic Trio.'

Their piece nevertheless retains an edgy quality, which also characterises Lee Tusman's 'Earsplode Dos', where a toy guitar is played through electronics, making many weird, computer-game noises.

Free improvisation is another big influence on many of these players: Barry Chabala's guitar solo sounds like a more gentle Derek Bailey (always the point of reference for avant-garde guitar, though so individualistic he sounds like no-one else, even if his ghost echoes in all their playing). But more obviously it has the sound of jazz electric guitar (Kenny Burrell, Tal Farlow), and is much more melodic, less deliberately broken-up and abstract. Unfortunately, as a result, it seems to be caught in a continuum between these two poles, unsure which way it wants to go, and thus it does meander a bit, after a promising beginning.

A lot of the pieces make interesting use of electronic manipulation and 'found sounds': perhaps most notably, Phil Hargreaves' 'At the end of the street', which opens Disc 2. He's displayed an interest in the interaction between instrument and environment, 'real world' sounds and 'otherworld' sax sonorities, in his album with Caroline Kraabel for Leo Records, 'Where we Were: Shadows of Liverpool' (2004), which was recorded over a number of years at various resonant locations around the city (in libraries, churches, and halls, under bridges), and edited into a kind of sound collage for the final release. I listened to this piece for the first time late at night, while drifting off to sleep, and the environmental sounds were truly eerie and effective, floating in from the edge of consciousness, becoming part of the musical texture in a convincing way. The track is marred by Hargreaves' vocals, which don't seem to follow any particular melody, and kind of drift along aimlessly and out-of-tune: deliberate I'm sure, but I'm not a great vocals fan anyway, and when they're delivered like this, it really puts me off. A shame, as the words themselves are interesting ("once I journey to the end of the street, I'll reach eternity" – a curious mixture of the mundane and the ephemeral), and the overdubbed bass/sax improv that follows (Hargreaves is equally capable on both instruments) is promising.

A recent collaborator of Hargreaves, Glenn Weyant, also contributes a piece. Like Australian improv violinist Jon Rose, he has gained some notoriety for playing fences, this time between Mexico and the US, in a statement that's political as much as musical. Here though, he sticks to piano, and to an instrument of his own invention, the kestrel 920. With these, he echoes the minimalism of Reich, through stark, repeated piano figures, and the minimalist-influenced ambience of Eno in the otherworldly sounds created by the kestrel. It's an engaging piece, which would be very at home on some film soundtrack, accompanying a journey into the desert, streaks of light remaining in the sky at dusk, progressively reaching epiphany, or perhaps darkness – there's a sense of reaching for a goal as things become more and more frantic, although it ends up merely fading out.

As you've probably gathered, I haven't space to consider every contribution in detail, even in this fairly lengthy review, and so I should probably conclude with this request: download it, get a CD copy, listen to it for yourself. It's a fascinating collection of contemporary music, and well worth hearing.

(Review by David Grundy)

UTE WASSERMANN - *BIRDTALKING*

Label: Nur Nicht Nur

Release Date: 2006

Tracklist: Siamese; Labial Pops; Glottal Song; Multipel I; Multipel II; Trill Territory; Labial Plonks; Subsong; Nightcap **Personnel:** Ute Wassermann: voice

Additional Information: This album is pretty hard to get hold of, so your best bet is to order it from the distributors, at <http://www.nurnichtnur.com/index.html>.

not for the fainthearted this.

ute wasserman makes pure abstract vocal sounds.

she don't dress it up much.

you just gotta get in there with her.

hold on tight and concentrate.

ute wasserman;

I first came across about a year ago.

I'd just been totally bowled over by

this trumpeter birgit ulher live in newcastle

and I wanted to buy some product.

birgit recommended this cd with ute wasserman on it.

she also features regularly with

richard barrett and they have a duo album out.

and she's a regular member of barret's fORCH ensemble

who were on radio 3 just the other week.

saturday night oct 6th 2007.

if you missed it ask yourself what you were doing instead

and then ask yourself how your life got so wrong

that you weren't in front of your hifi with your heaphones on.

ok what we got on this here album is

9 tracks of unadulterated vocal free improvisation.

well, strictly it's 5 tracks unadulterated.

2 tracks where wasserman accompanies herself

using electronic reverberation and then

2 tracks which contain 2 vocal tracks laid on top each other.

it is unhurried music. it isn't going anywhere.

it's slow music. it sure as hell don't cook.

and if you're in love with the idea of someone

tearing forth with something emotionally meaningful

this aint for you as far as I can relate to it.

wasserman keeps it very simple. she makes a sound

and she follows it up with more sound.

she uses overtones, yodelling, multiphonics.

sometimes she goes ping.

it's mostly short phrases that stop and start

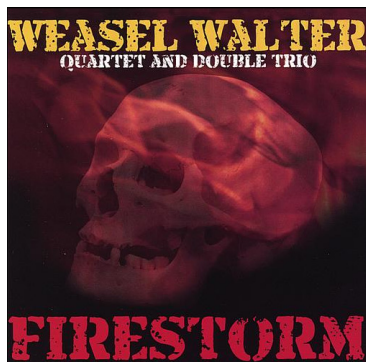
one follows the other.
 she don't tend to use coughs or splutters
 or words. as I say it comes across as purely abstract.
 it's 9 tracks around 9 minutes, 7 minutes, or 5 minutes..
 one track as short as 2min25secs.
 although I don't think each track necessarily
 has its own life form. it's that european free improv
 thing of breaking up the total soundscape
 into bite size chunks and calling these chunks
 separate tracks. I think you could edit out the gaps
 between tracks and sink into it as one long soundscape.

it's sparse. there's not loads going on at any given moment.
 it's best to sit back and relax and let her take you with her,
 play it loud and go inside the sound with the lady

ok let's try and give you an idea of the sound.
 you'll get a shout with throaty hoarseness in it.
 the shout will elongate the length of a breath
 and she'll follow that sound through to its conclusion.
 maybe she'll warble it, or dip it down and down
 and she'll put a high whistling overtone on it.
 or she'll yodel it and split the sound.
 it has a siberian slant to it overall if I can place it anywhere.
 there are no obvious jokes or native american indian colourings.
 most of her phrases seem to last the length of a long breath.
 she don't do a lot of staccato rhythm.
 she don't chase a beat, and take sharp breaths to do it.
 she follows her breath. you will hear voice thrown out and
 bent around the room. maybe she's playing. maybe it's playful
 but I don't know.

it's cool. it's intelligent. get it.
 stay in with it on a saturday night
 and improve your life.

(Review by Anthony Whiteford)



**WEASEL WALTER QUARTET & DOUBLE TRIO -
*FIRESTORM***

Label: ugEXPLODE records

Release Date: 2007

Tracklist: Ignition; Firestorm; Meditations on Violence; Continual
 Rage; Shock Troop; Self-Immolation Blues; Refraction

Personnel: Elliott Levin (tenor sax) Marco Eneidi, Marshall Allen (alto
 sax) Mario Rechters (alto and sopranino sax, zurna) Damon Smith
 (electric upright bass and acoustic bass) Lisle Smith (bass – 1,5) Marc
 Edwards (drums – 1,5) Weasel Walter (drums)

Additional Information: Recorded live at three concerts in New York

(Tonic & The Stone) and in Philadelphia (Danger House), during February 2007. Available for download at emusic.com or through itunes.

Weasel Walter, best known as the drummer and leader of long-running punk-jazz/no wave/ prog band The Flying Luttenbachers, here concentrates on full-blown free jazz with energy levels worthy of Brotzmann/Cecil Taylor: noisy, white-heat, and extremely intense. In the man's own words, the improvisations presented on the album "express highly articulated violence and fury." Recorded at three different gigs, three slightly different ensembles are featured, perhaps the most powerful of which appears on 'Ignition' and 'Shocktroop': the rhythm section is doubled, with Marc Edwards (who's recorded a similarly explosive session with his band Slipstream Time Travel) joining Walter on drums, and Lisle Ellis joining Damon Smith on bass, while saxophonists Marco Eneidi and Elliott Levin demonstrate an ability to play for an extended period of time at the sort of boiling point that, if it features at all in more mainstream jazz, only features to articulate a climax; here, it is the main means of expression. As Smith puts it in a response to Derek Taylor's review for the online review centre Bagetellen, "we obviously go for a single-minded approach here on purpose...we know where we are going and go right there."

The focus is exclusively on the energy, force and density of the group interplay – it makes no secret of the fact; indeed, it positively revels in it. You get exactly what you expect. To generalize, while free improvisation may be about discovery, about hearing unexpected sounds (so that, paradoxically, the unexpected becomes the expected), free jazz is a style with a clear sonic range and force. Nevertheless, it's not emotionally one-track, as claimed in what is probably the most frequent criticism made of it (apart from the fact that it supposedly offends people's ears and sensibilities) – it can be very complex, from joyful to despairing to moody and melancholic, often several at once – music of conflict, of conflicting emotions, colliding musical ideas as well as complementary ones. This idea of conflict is raised by the titles ('Continual Rage,' 'Meditations on Violence', 'Shock Troop', 'Self-Immolation', and so on), something especially pertinent to these times, when the events in Iraq, and worldwide, trouble so many artists and citizens. As well as providing the possibility of a contemporary frame of reference, the idea that this is in some way zeitgeist music (just as the 'New Thing' tied in with the civil rights struggle and the problems of American global expansion and imperialism in the 60s and 70s), such concerns tie in with comments that Walter has made elsewhere, suggesting that he regards his work as a cathartic experience of some sort: what he calls an attempt to find beauty in "the madness and horror of life."

I know of one person who finds the sort of inner peace in free jazz (a highly troubled and disturbing form of music, if judged by conventional standards), that others might find in an ECM disc – perhaps this is what Walter means. It is certainly an expression of *something* very powerful to the musicians, that can also be powerful to the audience; in the right situation, and if they're in the right mood, it can be one of the most shearily visceral musical experiences known to man.

Obviously it is an approach with its limitations, but this is true of all music: I don't think that any genre, any style can be all-encompassing, despite the desire of a visionary/madman like Alexander Scriabin, in his unfinished 'Mysterium' project, to create an artistic event which would somehow involve/express the whole of humanity,

and conclude with the ending of the world. This sort of free jazz is no more limiting than fusion, or be-bop, or trad. jazz, or any other style you care to name.

If you like this type of music, you probably don't need much convincing, and you'll undoubtedly love this record. And, despite the deliberate lack of diversity, there is much to enjoy for the less favourably disposed listener: Walter's high speed, thrash-influenced drumming, full of insistent staccato patterns and frantic bass drum work, more Dave Lombardo than Sunny Murray; Richters and Ellis' addition of some different textures by doubling on high-pitched and noisy electronics; the presence of legendary 84-year old altoist Marshall Allen – taking a break, if you want to put it that way, from leading the Sun Ra Arkestra, and still going absolutely full-pelt too.

I'll leave the last word to Walter: "I haven't heard much good full-bore freaking out in the last few decades and my concept with this particular project is simply to push that aesthetic further, primarily for my own listening enjoyment...I offer people a blast of energy with this CD and I hope people can enjoy it."

(Review by David Grundy)

IN BRIEF

STEVE COLEMAN – *INVISIBLE PATHS: FIRST SCATTERING*

A solo record from M-base musician Steve Coleman, this one was bound to be interesting. He's renowned for making 'head music' – he's into obscure rhythmic concepts, and with titles like 'Ascending Numeration Reformed' and 'Fecundation 070118', he's once again not exactly presenting himself as the most accessible artist around. But despite the theoretical complexity that seems to underlie these compositions and improvisations for alto saxophone, they're remarkably easy to negotiate aurally: with his clear tone and supple melodic phrasing, they have a lovely liquid, flowing quality to them, and a real sense of concentration, of engagement (Coleman occasionally punctuates the sax lines with grunts that seem deliberately constructed as a part of the music (as opposed to the rather more superfluous mumblings of Keith Jarrett)).

LAFAYETTE GILCHRIST/HAMID DRAKE – *DUETS: LIVE AT THE VISION FESTIVAL 2006/ LAFAYETTE GILCHRIST – 3*

Pianist Gilchrist started late, at the age of 18, but he's certainly been a fast learner: self-taught, he joined David Murray's group in 2000, and now on to his second record as a leader (and first with a trio). Like Miles Davis with 'On the Corner', he's expressed a desire to move jazz back to the streets. "Everything I write is dance music," he's said in an interview. "You're supposed to move to it in some kind of way. Even if it's just nodding your head or patting your foot, the body is involved." Nevertheless, the muscular angularity of his playing and compositions perhaps owes as much to classical music as it does to modern urban black music; on the duet recording with Hamid Drake, he also shows his debt to free jazz, and to the high energy approach of Cecil Taylor, with a thunderous, dramatic performance that's full of dark, heavy left-hand work, matched all the way by Drake's earth tremors.

Things are a bit more patient on '3': he doesn't clog things up too much, leaving a lot of space, concentrating on finding interesting, often dissonant chords and phrases, rather than simply playing for the sake of it. Like Jason Moran, he concentrates on spiky

rhythmic complexity and is strongly influenced by hip-hop: both players have got a lot of praise in the jazz press (Gary Giddins is a fervent admirer of Moran), but I do tend to find their playing somewhat cold. This was admittedly not the case in Gilchrist's previous recorded appearances, as a sideman with David Murray (where he could whip up quite a storm), and in his own debut as a leader, where a larger band allowed for more colouristic and emotional variety.

Ultimately, '3' is a formative record – he's still not quite a fully mature solo voice, but he's articulate, musically and in interviews, and his artistic aims are laudable: "I think the community needs to be disturbed at this point. The community needs to be disturbed by music. If it's instrument music, I think the sound of it, the tone of it, should have a certain urgency. And it should reflect the real world." Amen to that. Let's hope Gilchrist can build on the potential showed here and start to really express such a desire in his work.

MATS GUSTAFFSON/ YOSHIMI – *WORDS ON THE FLOOR*

If only for one moment, this album should be noticed: something extraordinary, that I can honestly say I have never experienced before while listening to a piece of music. About 32 minutes into track 2, Gustaffson introduces some wind-like electronics behind Yoshimi's vocals, and it genuinely seemed to me as though a cool breeze was coming at me from the speakers, a symbiosis of senses I've never felt before. This was probably due to mental association - the sound of rain might have made me feel cold - but still, it was an intriguing sensation.

The rest of the record is solid improvisation, for a difficult combination of instruments – the voice of Yoshimi, lead singer with experimental rock group The Boredoms, and the multi-instrumental antics of Gustaffson, one of the leading lights in the European free jazz/improv scene at the moment (his record with Peter Brotzmann and Paale Nilsson-Love, 'The Fat is Gone', is in this magazine's top ten list for 2007). A somewhat surprising pairing, it works pretty well: Gustaffson tones down his approach somewhat – the context necessitates a more subtle style of playing – but this remains very challenging music. An interesting listen.

JOE LOVANO/ HANK JONES – *KIDS: LIVE AT DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA*

Pretty much standard issue sax/piano duet, I suppose, but that doesn't make it any less attractive: ruminative, melancholy, romantic, wistful, occasionally sprightly and upbeat. Jones and Lovano have collaborated before, on the quartet date 'Joyous Encounter', and it's nice to hear them continue the empathetic partnership they demonstrated there in a more stripped-down setting. 'Lazy Afternoon' in particular is given a gorgeous, unfussy reading that steers the line between dryness and over-egged emoting with consummate care.

WYNTON MARSALIS – *FROM THE PLANTATION TO THE PENITENTIARY*

Marsalis' rejection of the musical aesthetic of the 60s New Thing also extends to a less radically militant political outlook; he's still angry about things, but he tends to express his feelings in a more debonair way. That said, this record comes on pretty strong, against a whole host of targets: though he's a Bush opponent, and has been particularly strong in his criticism of the way the government handled Hurricane Katrina,

he doesn't spare the left either. In fact, they probably get even shorter shift on this record.

As the title illustrates, he seems to be getting at the idea that blacks can do it to themselves as much as being victims of whiteness: he's depicted on the cover painting with a gold chain round his neck that merges the slave collar with contemporary 'bling' – a neat visual trick that perhaps captures a subtlety the music doesn't. 'Where Y'all At', on which he delivers a brief rap performance, makes some interesting points about the compromise, hypocrisy and failure of his, and previous generations, to bring about the social change they so loudly advocate: "*All you '60s radicals and world-beaters, Righteous revolutionaries, Camus-readers, Liberal students, equal-rights pleaders: What's goin' on now that y'all are the leaders?*" It's a point well made, but Marsalis comes unstuck in the criticism of hip-hop that also pervades the track. Firstly, it seems perverse to attack that genre using its mechanisms (like playing jazz fusion to show how bad jazz fusion is). Secondly, Marsalis' view of hip-hop is a simplistic one that ignores its valuable political engagement and social commitment. No one's pretending that there are not problems, serious problems, with the genre, especially in its modern mainstream form, but in dismissing the entire genre Marsalis is presenting a typically confused message. '

The fact remains, that, in the end, even if you ignore all the posturing polemical force of 'Where Y'all At', and other tracks (Marsalis is not the most subtle writer of song lyrics), the music itself ain't that great. The band is decent, though Marsalis is not really at his best (check out *Live at the House of Tribes* for a better recent example of his undoubted skill as a mainstream jazz performer); the vocals of young singer Jennifer Sanon have been much-praised, and she's certainly a capable musician. An interesting point of comparison might be Leena Conquest on William Parker's 'Raining on the Moon.' In fact, that's the record it's probably most constructive to compare this with: both feature prominent vocals and address issues of social and political justice (Parker's more obliquely, perhaps). Yet whereas Parker's is characterized by a more controlled emotionalism (even if it skirts sentimentality at times), and is very much about the polished performance of a top-notch jazz band, Marsalis lets himself get overwhelmed by the somewhat incoherent message he's trying to get across. (When the man behind the million-dollar-earning Lincoln Centre, who's been involved in high-profile, glossy advertising campaigns for big companies, calls a track 'Super Capitalism', you maybe raise an eyebrow). And that's why 'Raining on the Moon' is in 2007's top 10 and 'From the Plantation...' isn't.

MOSTLY OTHER PEOPLE DO THE KILLING – *SHAMOKIN!*

"I like my jazz with some dirt on it, sometimes a lot of dirt": so says bassist, and leader of this group Moppa Elliot. Don't expect this music to be reverent: it isn't, and it's a great deal of fun. The tunes and improvisations are playfully wide-ranging in their allusions: from bossas to bugaloos, rock to smooth Jazz, and swing to disco, often within the same composition. All the musicians bring a diverse range of stylistic influences and experience of different playing contexts to bear on such chaotically varied music: saxophonist Jon Irabagon was once a member of rock band Bright Eyes, but also displays an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz saxophone masters; Kevin Shea, on drums, also has an association with experimental rock; while Moppa Elliott has played with singer/songwriters, chamber pop and jazz acts, and various circus bands. Also featured is

the fine trumpeter Peter Evans, whose own Quartet album is on the records of the year list, and demonstrates a more serious approach to deconstructing jazz tradition. In a suitably flamboyant closer, a tune by another trumpeter, Dizzy Gillespie's 'A Night in Tunisia,' is subjected to a twenty-one minute performance that Elliott describes in the liner notes as a "jazz orgy, [which] includes references to the majority of recorded sound of the last century." Indeed, these notes are just as fun and thought-provoking as the music itself, written under the tongue-in-cheek pseudonym 'Leonardo Featherweight.' A nicely irreverent record, yet one that's full of serious musical intent underneath all the playfulness.

WILLIAM PARKER/ HAMID DRAKE - *SUMMER SNOW*

A second volume of duets from this master rhythm section, five years on from the first ('First Communion/ Piercing the Veil', recently re-issued in expanded form). The feeling is more meditative this time round, less rhythmically forceful (though they can *really* lock into a groove when they want to). Both play a wide variety of instruments: Drake on tabla, frame drum, and gongs, as well as his more usual drumkit, Parker on doson'ngoni, shakuhachi, dumbek, talking drum, water bowls, and bass. It tends to meander along somewhat inconsequentially – one never feels the musicians are stretching themselves overmuch, though they're so absolutely in command that the results are still extremely professional – and shares some of the same faults that Don Cherry's 'world music' suffered: rambling, lack of focus, a rather gimmicky use of ethnic instrumentation. Still, it will undoubtedly find fans.

MARIA SCHNEIDER- *SKY BLUE*

Gil Evans protégée Schneider funds and organises her recordings for the internet-only label ArtistShare: her 2004 recording *Concert in the Garden*, released through them, became the first disc to win a Grammy award with no in-store distribution. This latest disc is again available as a download from Artistshare, or as a nicely packaged physical CD (only website from her website, mariaschneider.com).

The Evans influence is obviously pretty strong, though Schneider displays an interest in more exotic textures (even if, paradoxically, here approach is a tad more populist and conventional than that of her mentor). Centre-piece, and longest track on the album is 'Cerulean Skies', a twenty-minute jazz tone-poem, commissioned for Peter Sellars' New Crowned Hope Festival in Vienna. Donny McCaslin gets plenty of space to blow some powerful tenor sax improvisations, but the real interest lies in the unusual textures Schneider spins. This she does through incorporating some unusual elements into the band: Gary Versace on accordion, wordless vocals by Luciana Souza, and a sample of Cerulean warbler birdsong, used for decorative effect, à la Respighi's Pines of Rome. Elsewhere, some Latin flavours, and a heartfelt tribute to a friend who died of cancer are other highlights in an approach that's lyrical, colourful and expansive. Along with Charles Tolliver's wonderfully vibrant 'With Love', this is proof that big-band jazz *does* have a future in the twenty-first century.

JOE MORRIS/ KEN VANDERMARK/ LUTHER GRAY- *REBUS*

Fine free(ish) jazz with Morris, on guitar this time, playing alongside Chicago saxophonist Ken 'volcanic' Vandermark and drummer Luther Grey. On the fifth track,

guitar and rums keep a roiling, tense motion beneath Vandermark's brawny, muscular solo, giving a real edge to what might otherwise be considered a somewhat unremarkable tenor improvisation. Indeed, one could say that Vandermark's playing obscures the focus somewhat - in sense, this is a track masquerading as something it is not: free jazz. Instead it is a track dedicated primarily to rhythm, and extremely edgy and subtle bass drums and guitar interaction. Not that Vandermark isn't equally capable of engaging with the rhythmic stuff: he's much more than just a free jazz blower, as he demonstrates here. It all adds up to a pretty good record.

DAVID S. WARE QUARTET – *RENUNCIATION*

The farewell performance by this seminal jazz group, recorded at the 2006 Vision Festival in New York, this perhaps illustrates why it was a good idea for them to split up while they did: while still powerful and compelling music – muscular, soulful, utterly heartfelt – it doesn't have quite the same impact as their best work. I suspect that the group reached its peak with the 3-CD 'Live in the World' set, or the version of Rollins' 'Freedom Suite', and it was probably a good idea for all concerned to develop their talents in different contexts.

It's a fine album nonetheless: what Ware has learn most from Coltrane is that musical attainment can only come through spiritual struggle, and these pieces demonstrate a similarly hard-won arrival at a goal. Part three of the titular suite finds him playing consistently in the higher ranges of his sax, over the groundings of Shipp's piano, which perhaps prevents him from flying as high as he could – though their interaction is solid. Brown's drumming is ferocious and Parker hits the bass incredibly hard, slamming his way through to add to the impression of granite strength that the group generates. As well as the suite, the disc also features the rather wonderful 'Ganesh Sound', which definitely justifying repeated hearings.

EBERHARD WEBER *STAGES OF A LONG JOURNEY*

A hell of a lot better than fellow ECM bassist Miroslav Vitous' dire follow-up to his own 'Universal Syncopations', this finds Weber presenting a substantial (over 70-minute) collection of orchestral pieces, recorded live, with a wide range of collaborators, most notably saxophonist Jan Garbarek. I know someone who thinks JG's work is a lot better here than it has been on his own recent releases (such as the soporific – and thus appropriately titled – 'In Praise of Dreams'), although I always find it pretty hard to take more than a small dose of his playing. My own personal prejudices subsuming more balanced critical judgement, I'm sure. Still, there it is – Garbarek's the main soloist (though Weber gets plenty of space of his own, with a three minute solo feature, 'Air', closing the disc). If you like the man's playing, chances are you'll be pleased. If, like me, you don't, it's probably still possible to swallow your prejudices and enjoy what is often rather fine music.

The record is a bit of a mixed bag, and there are perhaps just as many hits as misses: the beatboxing combined with steel pan percussion on 'Hang Around' is an interesting idea, but doesn't really work, and things do tend to ramble. Still, at its best, the music has a feeling of sheer bounding optimism and hopeful lyricism that's really refreshing: the opener, 'Silent Feet', and ninth track, 'Yellow Fields', are probably the best examples on the disc.

MIKE WESTBROOK (THE VILLAGE BAND) – *WAXEYWORK SHOW*

(For more on this album, see the Mike and Kate Westbrook interview feature earlier in the magazine). The Westbrook's latest project finds them uniting the ghoulish fascination of the Victorian fairground with that of the internet in the titular suite. Kate's lyrics are off-kilter and surreal – who else could get away with mentioning David Beckham in a jazz piece? – and the music perfectly captures the idiom the words suggest, with a mixture of the brooding and sinister, and a slightly tongue-in-cheek sense of the absurd. In the second half, vintage American jazz meets the British brass band tradition: Mingus and Jelly Roll Morton rub shoulders with a masterful reading of Tadd Dameron's 'If You Could See Me Now' that's unfussy but genuinely affecting, and proves Kate Westbrook's credentials as a straight jazz singer. The rest of the band, local players from in and around the Westbrook's home-town of Dawlish in Devon, are also a pleasant surprise: alto player Stan Willis in particular is full of passion and drive. It may not be the most ambitious thing the Westbrooks have ever done (that may be their masterpiece, 'London Bridge is Broken Down', soon due for re-issue), but it's thought-provoking, full of varied and intriguing atmospheres, textures, and emotions, and, above all, it's rollicking good entertainment.

JOHN ZORN – *FROM SILENCE TO SORCERY*

One of Zorn's classical music releases, this consists of 'Goetia', a work in eight fairly short movements for string trio, and two longer pieces, 'Shibboleth', where the trio is expanded to include percussion and clavichord, and 'Gris-Gris', for percussion. Pieces are based around familiar Zorn themes of black magic, and are alternately mysterious, spicily rhythmic, and bracingly dissonant. Music itself is relatively undistinguished – I've never really been convinced by Zorn's talents as a classical composer. The ideas are more interesting than the actual sounds they generate. This one's got rather a minority appeal, I have to say.

(All 'In Brief' reviews by David Grundy)

RE-ISSUES

ANTHONY BRAXTON / JOE FONDA – *DUETS 1995*

Label: Clean Feed

Release Date: 2007 (orig. 1995)

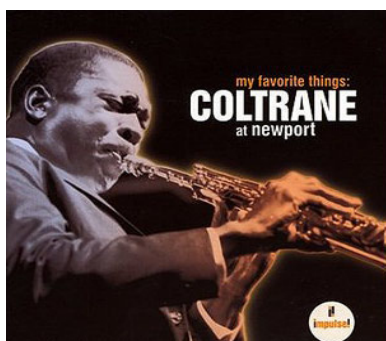
Tracklist: All of you; Relentlessness; Out of the Cage; Something from the Past; Composition 168+147; Composition 136; Composition 173; Autumn in New York

Personnel: Anthony Braxton: C-melody and alto sax, contrabass and B-flat clarinet; Joe Fonda: bass

This album was originally released by Konnex, one of those unsung milestones that necessitate of a reissue in order for people outside the experts' circle to dip their toe in something that is described - often, and very superficially - as difficult, if not plain hostile. I'm referring to Anthony Braxton's music, one of the most important expressions of advanced composition and off-commonplace reed playing of the last century, which jazz purists classify as "too cerebral". I remember, a while back, a review of a Leo CD in which the poor writer misjudged Braxton's quarter-tone dexterity and unyoked

improvisational acumen as “errors” in the interpretation of some standard, causing an amused email reaction by Leo Feigin himself who reportedly was “roaring with laughter” upon reading that nonsense. In these duets, in which the saxophonist plays C melody and alto sax, contrabass and B flat clarinets, bassist Joe Fonda - himself a stalwart of intelligent jazz - lends his dazzling technique, both with arco and bare fingers, the couple generating music that features everything at the right place in the right moment. The record is opened and closed by two homages to tradition, “All of you” and “Autumn in New York”; I dare you to find more atypical approximations and tasteful deviations from the classic rendition of such well-known pieces, all the while without lacking an ounce of respect for the originals. But, as told before, this could be a good entrance door for “Braxton beginners”; if one looks for more dramatic absences of compromise, “Composition 168+147” will do the job, Braxton’s unpredictable flutters, superb dissonant lyricism and forward-looking open mindedness once again making the difference. Not between himself and other players, but among prepared and unprepared audiences.

(Review by Massimo Ricci, originally published at ‘Touching Extremes’ - <http://spazioinwind.libero.it/extremes/touchinghome.htm>)



**JOHN COLTRANE – MY FAVORITE THINGS:
COLTRANE AT NEWPORT**

Label: Impulse

Release Date: March 2007

Tracklist: I Want To Talk About You; My Favorite Things; Impressions; Introduction By Father Norman O'Connor; One Down, One Up; My Favorite Things.

Personnel: John Coltrane: soprano and tenor saxophone; McCoy Tyner: piano; Jimmy Garrison: bass; Roy Haynes: drums (1-3); Elvin Jones: drums (5,6).

Additional Information: Tracks 1-3 recorded at the Newport Jazz Festival, Rhode Island, 7/7/1963 (previously released, in edited form, on ‘Newport 63’). Tracks 4 and 5 recorded at the Festival, 2/7/1965, and originally released on ‘New Thing at Newport’.

I don’t know just how many versions of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “My Favorite Things” John Coltrane recorded, but conservatively speaking it numbers in the dozens, the majority of them performed by the “classic quartet” of Coltrane on saxophone (soprano), McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass and Elvin Jones on drums, but several versions do feature different lineups, too. The song held a deep fascination for Coltrane; it was a measuring stick for his mastery of the soprano, for his bands’ cohesiveness and communication; and for listeners, it provides insight into the development of the sound John William Coltrane heard in his head. It varies from the buoyant near-pop hit originally recorded and released on the album of the same name (Atlantic, 1960) to the brutal and coarse assault of 1967’s *The Olatunji Concert*, recorded shortly before his death. In between, there are shorter versions, and marathon versions with lengthy bass solos. I probably have a dozen or more iterations in my collection, and it seems every time I buy another Coltrane release (which I do with alarming regularity), my wife jokingly asks, “Does he do ‘My Favorite Things?’” It’s an apt question, for what can be the appeal of hearing the same song over and over and over again by the same musician? The answer is that it is always and never the same.

The dervish-like sound of that soprano horn is a constant, as is the obvious

commitment, skill and passion of the musicians involved. But in almost every other respect, they are unique. The sound, the *feel* - there is always some detail which differs in the telling. The 1960 Atlantic is joyful and breathless; the nearly hour-long Japanese performance is grueling but rewarding; the above-mentioned Olatunji version is harrowing and raw; the Half Note recording sounds more exotic than most others. Interestingly, there are two versions on the latest live Coltrane CD release (and I sincerely hope they keep uncovering/repackaging/recombining this stuff), fittingly titled *My Favorite Things: Coltrane Live at Newport*. The CD is a compilation of Trane's performances at that revered Rhode Island festival in 1963 and '65 with his quartet. What's noteworthy is that the two performances feature slightly different lineups - the classic group in '65, but with veteran drummer Roy Haynes filling in for the, um, "ill" Elvin Jones in 1963.

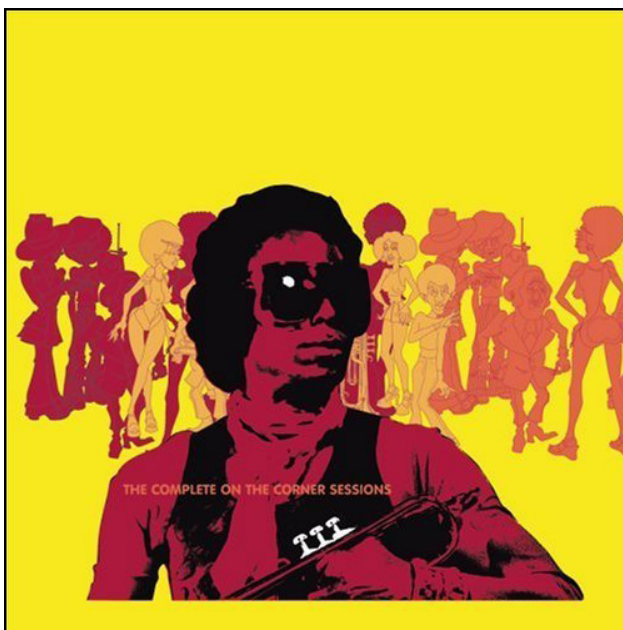
What the 1963 version makes plain is the exact nature and overall importance of Jones' contribution to the quartet's sound. There is no question that Coltrane's horn is the lynchpin of the whole, this music machine which, even at it's most unrestrained and *out*, retains an elegiac sound - the sonic embodiment of the leader's spiritual quest. But Jones' high-hat, his momentum, the series of mini-crescendos he produces, are a sizeable contributor to that brimstone-scented religiosity. Without them, the band is a different entity altogether.

The 1963 version with Haynes on drums is lighter, *skippier*, than most others. It has a snap generally not present with this group (and that is most certainly not a criticism, simply an observation), a hard-bop oomph as opposed to a church music bombast. Haynes leads the group down different paths, producing a sound which suggests this band might've had a career as a supremely professional club act, had they chosen to pursue that end.

Jones is irreplaceable. Without him, the Classic Quartet would've been a different band. Haynes is himself a consummately skilled drummer, a true great, but what would *A Love Supreme* have sounded like with him and not Jones in the chair? The 1963 Newport performance is stunning and wondrous, and singular in the panoply of Coltrane's performances of the song. But its greater importance is in removing one of the legendary group's key elements and, in doing so, confirming that element's significance to the band's astonishing body of work.

I will forever be transfixed by John Coltrane's renderings of "My Favorite Things," a warhorse of a standard that would prove the artist's longstanding obsession. It was his *Leaves of Grass*, the thing to which he returned again and again, tweaking, further exploring, revising, plumbing, editing. This latest available version has added a new dimension to my appreciation of the song, and of the band which performed it so many times.

(Review by Andrew Forbes, originally posted at 'This is Our Music' blog – <http://thisisourmusic.blogspot.com/2007/08/my-favorite-things-or-what-difference.html>)



MILES DAVIS – *THE COMPLETE ON THE CORNER SESSIONS*

Label: Columbia/Legacy

Release Date: October 2007

Additional Information: 8th and last in Columbia's series of Miles Davis boxsets. Liner notes by Bob Belden, Tom Terrell and Paul Buckmaster. As well as tracks previously unreleased in full/ previously unissued, the set contains music also available on the separate albums 'On the Corner,' (*) 'Get Up With It,' (**) and 'Big Fun.' (***)

Tracklist:

CD1: On The Corner [unedited master]; On The Corner [take 4]; One And One [unedited master]; Helen Butte/Mr. Freedom X [unedited master]; Jabali.
 CD2: Ife (**); Chieftain; Rated X (**); Turnaround [Agharta Prelude], Take 14; U-Turnaround [Agharta Prelude], Take 15.
 CD3: Billy Preston (**); The Hen [Untitled Original 730104 (take 1)]; Big Fun/Holly-wuud [take 2]; Big Fun/Holly-wuud [take 3]; Peace [Untitled Original 730726b (take 5)]; Mr. Foster [For Dave].
 CD4: Calypso Frelimo (**); He Loved Him Madly (**).
 CD5: Maiysha (**); Mtume(**); Mtume [take 11]; Hip Skip [Untitled Original 741106a (take 2, part 1)]; What They Do [Untitled Original 741106b (take 14)]; Minnie [Latin (take 7)].
 CD6: Red China Blues (**); On The Corner/New York Girl/Thinkin' Of One Thing And Doin' Another/Vote For Miles (*); Black Satin (*); One And One (*); Helen Butte/Mr. Freedom X (*); Big Fun; Holly-wuud.

Collective Personnel:

Miles Davis: trumpet, organ, electric piano; Bennie Maupin: flute, bass clarinet; John Stubblefield: soprano sax; Sam Morrison: tenor sax; Dave Liebman, Carlos Garnett, Sonny Fortune: soprano and tenor sax, flute; Wally Chambers: harmonica; Wade Marcus: brass arr.; Billy Jackson: rhythm arr.; Harold 'Ivory' Williams, Herbie Hancock, Lonnie Liston Smith, Cedric Lawson: electric piano, organ, synthesizer; Chick Corea: synthesizer; Pete Cosey, Cornell Dupree, Dominique Gaumont, John McLaughlin, Reggie Lucas, David Creamer: electric guitar; Colin Walcott, Khalil Balakrishna: electric sitar; Paul Buckmaster: cello; Michael Henderson: electric bass; Jack DeJohnette, Al Foster, Jabali Billy Hart, Bernard Purdie: drums; Jabali Billy Hart, James 'Mtume' Foreman, Don Alias: congas, percussion, handclaps; Badal Roy: tabla.

So, 2007 sees the final chapter in what's been an interesting project: Columbia's series of Miles Davis boxsets. It's telling that these have generated just as much, if not more interest, than most jazz released by contemporary artists – even beyond the grave, Miles casts a shadow over the music that's hard to escape from.

I must admit that I was greatly looking forward to this one, my appetite having been whetted by a couple of bootlegs featuring some of these pieces from the On the Corner sessions, among a plethora of other mid-70s offcuts. I love the feel and the texture of the music, quite different to what came before and after it – much more influenced by what would now, I suppose, be called 'world music,' with its plethora of sitars, congas,

bongos, kalimbas, cowbells, and so on – full of sinuous, twisting, evasive solos from some of the top players in the business. I love the audacity with which Miles constructs pieces from maybe just one simple riff, over which he lays down a magic carpet of rhythms and strange instrumental combinations and juxtapositions – distorted, Hendrixian guitars, strange synth whistles, seedy electric organs, cool and languorous flutes, burbling bass clarinets, wailing soprano saxes, biting wah-wahed trumpet. I love the complex emotional state he navigates: from mocking to triumphant to unutterably sad. There's a lot I love about it, as I love all of Miles' 70s outputs, for all its flaws.

How to listen? How to experience this dauntingly large box-set? Perhaps the best way is to sit down, lie down, make yourself comfortable, for however much time you have - several hours, preferably - and just soak it all in. You can't really capture its essence in snippets heard here and there – it is a music of moments in some ways, but that's not how it feels when it's coming through your speakers. Instead, it seems to create a single, extended, almost trance-like moment, that may extend across whole tracks, or even whole CDs. It reveals itself in an unwinding, uncoiling way, fitting in with these pieces' origins as, essentially, studio jam sessions: you may be struck by occasional flashes of extreme beauty or invention, but the focus is far more on the overall feel of the piece, the groove, the atmosphere. Depending on your mood, this can seem beguilingly unusual, but it can also lead to an irritating lack of focus, and sections which meander or



plod along, unsure of their direction. That accusations of 'selling-out' should still be considered a valid possibility, let alone mentioned, strikes me as absurd; granted, Miles' 80s output may to some extent make concessions to the prevailing tastes of the day (synths, drum machines, square pop beats) at the expense of artistic integrity, but his late 60s and 70s music is arguably the most challenging of his entire career. Perhaps the impression was enhanced by Miles himself, and by the marketing men at Columbia: he was big on rhetoric about connecting with

the black youth of his time, who were tuned into James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, and Sly Stone, and the presence of Corky McCoy's garish yet quirky street culture caricatures on the front cover probably sent strait-laced jazz fans running for cover. Elegant it wasn't, and, for the most part, neither was the music – it was alternately tight and messy, full of controlled fury channeled into obsessive bass grooves and chattering percussion.

When Miles did actively connect with the musical material of the popular artists of the time, the results were inevitably very different than the originals. This is what made his version of 'Human Nature' in the 80s so disappointing - he did very little with it, coming perilously close (in the studio version at least) to the sort of unadventurous, bland covers you'd expect from the likes of Kenny G. As far back as 'Filles de Killimnajoro', the bass-line from Hendrix's 'Wind Cries Mary' became an element in an impressionistic,

keyboard-rich delicate landscape of 'Mademoiselle Mabry'. Here, it's Minnie Riperton's 'Loving You,' getting a fairly straight treatment (prefiguring the 80s approach), but Miles turns it into a bittersweet lament, incredibly simple compared to Mabry, but with a throat-catching beauty about it that turns the 3-minute instrumental pop song into something amazingly tender and superlatively, meltingly lovely.

The reason for this appeal, and something which lies at the heart of all these tracks, is a deep sense of melancholy, sometimes rather bitter, sometimes sweetly mournful. It might be too simplistic to see it as merely a reflection of the times (the failure of 60s idealism, the ignominious end to America's involvement in Vietnam), but some sense of that has, I think, to come across: musicians are influenced by their contexts - Miles openly so. Yet one still needs to ensure that this is primarily enjoyed and digested as *music*, rather than history, as an aesthetic experience first and a cultural document second (if at all).

Even on the up-tempo numbers, like the boisterous reggae rhythm of 'Hip-Skip' (on which guitarist Pete Cosey plays drums), the overall impression is one of a desperate seriousness, at least in Miles' solo. You can hear how this changed in his generally far more optimistic playing, a decade or so later, on the reggae track from the album 'Aura', where he plays bright, clean, open. Here it's much darker.

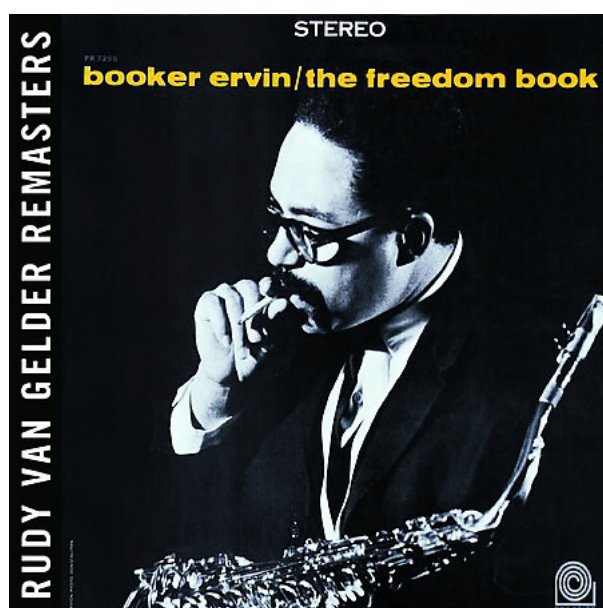
In fact, the more I think about it, the more I realise how essentially *bleak* this music is, something far from most of the pop music of the time. Though unacknowledged, it may primarily be this that has been picked up on by today's underground scene. True, the 'IDM' of artists like Aphex Twin, Squarepusher or Autechre plays to clubs full of people out for 'a good time,' and for an escape from contemporary societal realities, but at the same time, could it subconsciously remind them of the very things they flee from? Thus, though it apparently eschews a concern with politics, or religion, or anything of that gravity, it constitutes some sort of implicit cultural critique, or at least, a reflection of society's foibles. I'm not sure anybody's really picked up on this - the musicians themselves might deny it, and probably would - but I feel it's nevertheless an important part of Miles' legacy, and it's perhaps the reason why we keep listening, why we feel so compelled and fascinated by the music of a man journeying into a dark period in his life, even to the edge of madness.

This box-set, then, is Miles' heart of darkness. Much of it is far from essential music (sprawling, meandering, cluttered, dense - all valid criticism), and yet, and yet... It's stuff that no one else attempted, and thus, even if not fully realised, it's a darn sight better than the work of others fully realizing their aims with more limiting and conventional spheres. Plus, if Miles couldn't fully realise it, who could? The music on this box-set is a gauntlet thrown down over 30 years ago which so far no one has dared to pick up in more than fleetingly.

I could end the review there, but I don't feel I can, as I would seem to be encouraging you to splash a sizeable chunk of your hard-earned cash on this mega-expensive box. As with all the Columbia Miles boxes, it could have been trimmed a bit. For one, much of the music has nothing to do with *On the Corner* - disc 4 is just the two long pieces off 'Get Up with It,' recorded long after OTC had been released. Indeed, the whole of that album (2 discs worth) is included here, while 'Ife' is on *Big Fun*, and the alternate takes for OTC are barely different, so don't get much new music for your money. The comprehensive essays and recollections, previously unpublished photos,

detailed recording information, and sumptuous packaging (albeit with the rather frustrating fact that the booklet has been glued into the spine), are a tempting prospect. But, rather than milking this cash cow, it might have been a better idea on Columbia's part to release this as a 3-disc set. Why didn't they? Well, 6 CDs sounds so much more impressive than three, and, after the massive Jack Johnson and Cellar Door boxes, maybe they felt they had to keep up the bulkiness to retain public interest, and to give an impression of comprehensiveness. The problem is that the unissued tracks are worth hearing - but I'm not convinced it's worth spending £50 or more to hear them, and to replicate lots of stuff which is probably already in your collection. Columbia won't thank me for saying this, but I'm going to end up advising you to treat this one with caution - wait till a second-hand copy turns up for £20 quid on Amazon, or download the tracks you need from iTunes.

(Review by David Grundy)



BOOKER ERVIN – *THE FREEDOM BOOK* (Rudy Van Gelder Remaster)

Label: Prestige

Release Date: May 2007

Tracklist: A Lunar Tune; Cry Me Not; Grant's Stand; A Day to Mourn; Al's In; Stella by Starlight (Bonus Track)

Personnel: Booker Ervin: tenor sax; Jaki Byard: piano; Richard Davis: bass; Alan Dawson: drums

Additional Information: Recorded 3rd December 1963; originally released 1964.

Released amongst a batch of albums from the 1950's and 60's that have been remastered by Rudy Van Gelder, Booker Ervin's "The Freedom Book" ably demonstrates that there were those musicians outside the cauldron of the bands led by Coleman, Davis and Coltrane who also had their fingers on the pulse as to where the future of jazz might lay. It is hardly surprising that, amongst fans of this era of jazz, Booker Ervin's "The Freedom Book" is still held in high esteem by many.

Forty-four years later, this record can be seen as something of a crossroads between the Hard Bop favoured by labels like Blue Note and a newer generation fascinated by the prospect of opening the music up rhythmically, harmonically and even structurally. As the liner notes point out, today we might describe this as inside / outside playing – very much the calling card of an improviser worth his salt in 2007. Back in 1963, this was pretty radical.

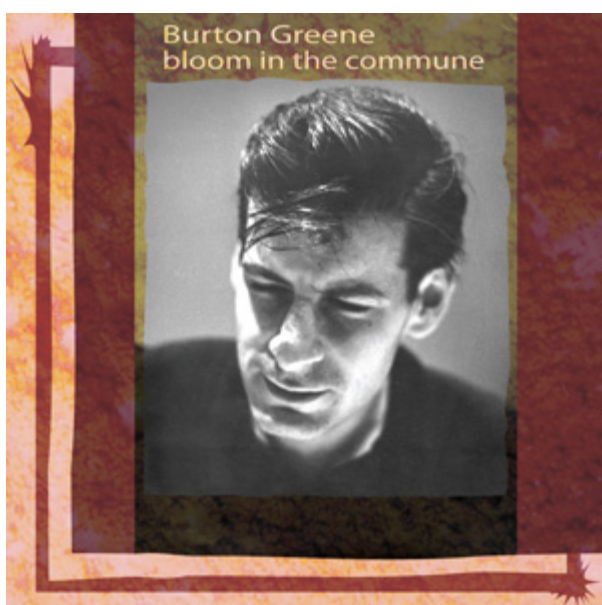
Amazingly, although some of the musicians had worked with each other before this date, this record is the culmination of a session a mere five hours after they had first played together as a group. The result is freshness in the music and all four musicians contribute remarkably explorative solos. On the downside, other than the two sumptuous

ballads (including “Cry me not” written by Randy Weston) and the bonus warm up track, the standard “Stella by starlight”, the up-tempo themes are not particularly memorable. They seem to be merely jumping off points for some remarkably creative playing.

The leader’s big tone comes straight out of the Texas tradition of tenor players with a slightly chewy sound and a muscularity that adapts well to the more sombre material such as “Cry me not” and “A day to mourn.” This latter composition is a dedication to J.F.K. who had been assassinated only a matter of weeks beforehand. The most impressive track is the blues “Grants Stand” that, despite being an almost throwaway motif, includes some fantastic playing by the pianist Jaki Byard whose scurrying runs evoke those that Cecil Taylor was making at that time on records such as “Conquistador.” You can almost hear the bars breaking during his solo. Commencing with a series of dissonant chords, this excursion represents one of the highlights of this record. Elsewhere, Byard demonstrates his ability to play with the sensitivity of Bill Evans whereas on the opening section of “Al’s In”, you could be forgiven for thinking that you were listening to Duke Ellington. Under-pinning the group is bassist Richard Davis’ who graced many classic forward-looking recording sessions during the 1960’s with his propensity to eschew the more obvious notes associated with the harmony. His bass lines deserve close attention throughout this record. Together with the adventurous palette of Byard, the shifting tonal colours really pull against the lines played by Ervin on tracks like “Al’s In” where Dawson’s propulsive drumming combine with them to dissemble the notions of time, harmony and form. Dawson, who was the drum tutor at Berklee College at the time, is the surprise package on this session and his responsiveness to his colleagues makes you scratch your head as to why such a phenomenal musician should not be better known.

Although there are other records that better serve as benchmarks in the emergence of Free Jazz during this period, Booker Ervin’s “The Freedom Book” does not deserve to be over looked and beautifully illustrates a time when some of the standard vocabulary of today’s jazz musicians was being worked out afresh. Recommended.

(Review by Ian Thumwood)



BURTON GREENE – *BLOOM IN THE COMMUNE*

Label: ESP

Release Date: November 2007

Tracklist: His Early Band/His ESP First Recording (interview); Cluster Quartet; Ballade II; Bloom in the Commune; Taking It out of the Ground; *Interview*- Recap of Session I & II (Bernard Stollman); How He Got Involved with ESP; The Music Scene; Music is Life; The Mind Set of That Time; Albert Ayler at Slug’s Saloon.

Personnel: Marion Brown: alto sax; Frank Smith: tenor sax (track 5); Burton Greene: piano, piano harp, percussion; Henry Grimes: bass; Dave Grant: drums (tracks 2 & 4) Tom Price: drums (tracks 3 & 5).

Additional Information: Recorded December 18th 1965; orig. released 1965.

Not the most well-known of musicians, pianist Burton Greene was active in the New York free jazz scene of the 1960s, in which he formed the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble with bassist Alan Silva, was a member of the Jazz Composers' Guild, and played with Albert Ayler, Sam Rivers, and singer Patty Watters. He was unusual in being a white man in what was primarily seen as a black man's music, though this caused no problems with his colleagues (apart from critic/author Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka); indeed, Archie Shepp called him "one of the best pianists around." However, by his own admission, he burned out, overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of the music he'd been involved in creating, and the physical and mental strain it placed on the performers ("there was a heavy mortality rate in that music, man," he's wryly observed). He moved to Holland at the end of the decade, where he changed direction: "I wanted to make a *balm* instead of a *bomb*" – which he did by playing Indian music under the guidance of his musical guru, sitarist Jamaluddin Bhartiya, and practising yoga under the guidance of his spiritual guru, Swamiji Satchidananda. More recently, he's been involved in re-workings of Jewish music with the band 'Klezmokum,' which were critically well-received, though rejected by John Zorn for his 'radical Jewish culture' series. Greene is still based in the Netherlands, living on a houseboat, perhaps making more money than he did in the 60s, but not getting that much more recognition (in fact, probably even less so), and not getting many more gigs.

And so to November 2007, when his debut as a leader is re-issued by ESP records. As with another recent re-issue on the label (Sunny Murray's self-titled album), this features about 20 minutes worth of audio interviews with Greene and ESP disk boss Bernard Stollman. Originally released under the rather unassuming name 'The Burton Greene Quartet', it's been re-titled with the snappier, and rather neat title of one of the pieces played on the date: 'Bloom in the Commune.' The 'bloom', I suppose, would be 'Ballad Number II', although I guess it could also refer to the blooming of collective (communal) energy that characterises this sort of music – expanding outwards from melody and line to sound exploration. More likely, it's just a neat little hook that'll cause people to take notice of what would otherwise look like a pretty innocuous package ("hmm, neat title, I might consider buying that").

Whether Greene will actually get any money from this reissue is doubtful (in an online interview he describes his shoddy treatment at the hands of Bernard Stollman and BYG/Actuel records in France over the years, a story which sadly rings true for many of the 'New Thing' artists.) Nevertheless, ESP have done a good job, and the interviews in particular are a nice touch – giving Greene a chance to reflect not only on this particular record date, but also the '60s in general and how free jazz was characteristic of that decade's spirit of upheaval. Traces of hippy mumbo-jumbo do creep into the conversation fairly frequently – it's hard to take him seriously when he starts talking about the "flower-garden universe" – but his comments about music made for profit as opposed to music made with artistic integrity, still resonate with the contemporary scene. He talks candidly about LSD, capitalist America, being an expatriot in Holland, John Coltrane, and, most intriguingly, the legendary Slug's Saloon show, where he performed with Albert Ayler, Rashied Ali, Henry Grimes, Marion Brown and Frank Smith. Apparently the performance was such a vociferous blow-out that the piano bench was bouncing three to four feet off of the stage! One drawback is that, despite the genuine interest in hearing such anecdotes and opinions, I can't help feeling that the additional

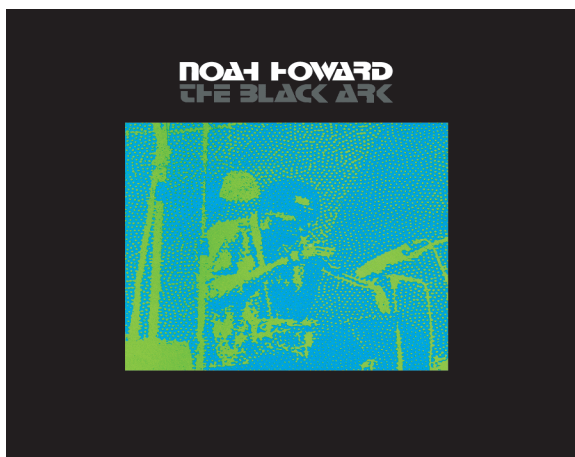
material makes the original album into something of a museum piece, an artefact rather than a living document. That's just my take, anyway, and the music is obviously what's more important – so what's it like?

Well, for a start, it features the wonderful altoist Marion Brown, perhaps still searching for a fully-formed individual voice at this stage (although he had already cut most famous moment on record, playing on Coltrane's 'Ascension'), and the great bassist Henry Grimes, whom Greene describes as the greatest pizzicato player in jazz. The other musicians are more obscure – both Frank Smith and Tom Price dropped out of the music, a fairly common story (the most famous examples being Guiseppi Logan and Grimes himself, who was presumed dead before his recent comeback). Still, they turn in decent performances, though it's hard to hear anything especially individual about their playing.

The opening piece, 'Cluster Quartet', predictably sees Greene splashing clusters all over the piano register, and exhilarating it is too: clearly Cecil Taylor was a big influence, but perhaps more important is the legacy of maverick classical composers like Charles Ives and Henry Cowell (from whom Greene took the idea of playing inside the piano, a technique which he pioneered in the jazz field). 'Ballade II,' with Brown's sweet-sour alto, again contains echoes of twentieth-century classical music, with its mood of uncertain, melancholic fragility – half-way between a love song and a lament. The title track gives drummer Dave Grant a moment in the spotlight, followed by Brown's probing, keening solo, before the tempo and mood drop for Greene's mysterious ruminations, mixing more conventional playing with in-the-piano scrapings and strummings, and things conclude with a hell-for-leather full-band finish. 'Taking It out of the Ground' marks Frank Smith's only recorded appearance; the piece starts off quite quietly, but his solo soon takes it into the realms of 'energy-music' – his wailing, smeary tenor contrasts with Marion Brown's more sweetly considered, piercing abstractions, to exhilarating effect.

In one of the interview tracks, Greene says, "I feel it's still very fresh," and whether it's timeless or not, as he claims (some would say it's very much of its time), it's definitely a compelling snapshot of an artist, a wider ethos and an attitude to making music. *"We played atomic energy music twenty-four hours a day, man, and we exploded like the Fourth of July."* – Burton Greene





NOAH HOWARD – *THE BLACK ARK*

Label: Bo' Weavil Records

Release Date: May 2007

Tracklist: Domiabara; Olé Negro; Mount Fuji; Queen Anne

Personnel: Earl Cross: trumpet; Noah Howard: alto sax; Arthur Doyle: tenor sax; Leslie Waldron: piano; Sirone (Norris Jones): bass; Mohammed Ali: drums; Juma Sultan: congas.

Additional Information: Initially released on Polydor in 1969 and then later reissued on a now out-of-print, Japan-only CD by the Freedom label.

Do lost classics live up to their potential, or are they only considered classics because they're lost, because they're obscure? Evan Parker, Derek Bailey and Han Bennink's 'Topography of the Lungs' was re-issued a couple of years ago. I personally found it utterly compelling, and it was one of the early recordings that I latched onto in a period when I was just starting to discover the joys of free jazz and improvisation, but some reviews I read were more lukewarm. It's probably right, then, to employ a little caution, not to get carried away: just because a record's been out of print for years, just because copies never sell for less than \$50 on ebay, just because word-of-mouth has it that this is a killer album, doesn't mean that we should approach it any differently to something that's been available for years, or that's just come out.

To be fair, this particular lost classic was more accessible than I may be conceding: what with the growth of internet 'sharity' blogs, where users post MP3s of out-of-print or rare albums, often ripped from the original LPs, it was possible to track down and listen to 'The Black Ark' without too much time or effort. Still, the fact that this has now appeared legitimately, and the artist can now finally start making some well-deserve money and enjoy the fruit of his labours, is surely cause for celebration.

Noah Howard, for those who don't know, is an important figure in free jazz, his searing and soulful alto sound perhaps more 'restrained' than some, but all the more compelling and emotionally direct for it. He's joined on this date by monster tenor saxophonist Arthur Doyle, whose recording debut this was – and what a debut! He would go on to make the brilliant 'Alabama Feeling', drop out of the scene during the 80s (when he was landed in a French jail on a trumped-up rape charge), then re-emerge during the 90s for some intense gigging and recording, and he's still around today.

The other musicians are a little less well-known: as far as I know, this is the only recorded appearance by Leslie Waldron (prompting speculation in some quarters that he wasn't a real person, and that this was simply a nom-de-plum (in the same way that 'George Lane' and 'Charlie Chan' were pseudonyms used by Eric Dolphy and Charlie Parker to avoid contractual disputes)). In terms of obscurity, I guess trumpeter Earl Cross is a bit like Norman Howard, who played on Ayler's 'Witches and Devils/Spirits', then converted to Islam, and disappeared from the jazz world (though his own 'Burn Baby Burn,' co-led with saxophonist Joe Phillips, has just been re-issued by ESP Disk). Cross was perhaps slightly more high-profile, leading one session of his own on the German

Circle label, and taking sideman duties on three Charles Tyler albums (including the very fine 'Saga of the Outlaws' for Nessa).

Bassist Sirone, though not exactly be a household name, got around a bit more than Cross and Waldron, most notably as a member of the Revolutionary Ensemble, with Leroy Jenkins and Jerome Cooper, and a sideman in the Cecil Taylor Unit that recorded 'One Too Many Salty Swift and Not Goodbye.' Drummer Mohammed Ali (brother of Rashied, and, according to Sunny Murray, actually the better drummer of the two, though he has a far lower profile) was another one who appeared on several late 60s and 70s records, with the likes of Frank Wright, Bobby Few, Archie Shepp, Alan Shorter, and Albert Ayler, before dropping out of sight. Meanwhile, the percussionist Juma Sultan appeared subsequently on one Archie Shepp album, although he's perhaps best known for playing with Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock and appearing on some of the guitarists' posthumous albums. From what I can gather, he was also heavily involved in the 'Loft Jazz' scene of the 70s, and did a pretty comprehensive job in documenting a whole lot of exciting avant-garde jazz, both in audio and video form. More information can be found at: <http://www.clarkson.edu/projects/jumasarchive/index.php>.

Anyway, before everything gets too anorakey, let's get back to the music. The tracks often start with simple, catchy, hummable melodies, before taking them to passionate extremes, where the sound of Arthur Doyle's BURNING sax is a particular highlight, over thick chunks of Waldron's piano, and sometimes in tandem with Cross' trumpet playing, which is endowed with the same grainy, throaty, aggressively forward feel found in the great free jazzers Alan Shorter, Don Ayler, Norman Howard, and Don Cherry.

There's a somewhat cosmopolitan feel: from the Latin/film noir-flavoured 'Ole Negro', with Few's jazzy solo, to the Orientalism of 'Mount Fuji', which has a melody that approaches tweeness, but is actually rather charming. In any case the focus is not really on the melody itself- it serves more as a springboard for some righteous blowing and sparkling, ferocious interplay. Also note the way that, as with Coltrane, the melody seems to have become transformed once returned to -struggle and exploration making the starting-point the more precious for having been 'attained' the hard way; or as TS Eliot put it, "We shall not cease from exploration/And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time."

On 'Fuji', Cross constructs his solo out of yelps and growls, buzzing repeated fingers and tension-building long, held notes. Doyle goes straight for the jugular, like Pharoah Sanders, concentrating on sound and emotion rather than melodic line and careful construction: wailing and screaming, he's liable to stay in the extreme upper register of his horn for minutes at a time, unleashing barrages of stratospheric trills and supplications. Richard Williams had this to say about Doyle in his 1972 review of the album for Melody Maker, thus: "this man is dangerous - he never plays anything you could recognize, just furious blasts of rage. His solo on "Domiabra" couldn't be written down, or even sorted out. It sounds more like raw energy than anything I've ever heard. He's nasty, man." Another review, with reference to that same solo, puts it more dramatically: "he sounds as if he's trying to blow his whole body through the saxophone."

Through all of this, the pure, smooth directness of Howard's alto cuts through like a knife, and it is the moments when all three horns are going for it that are the most

compelling on the album. Try resisting the sound of Doyle roaring, Cross blasting, Howard obsessively repeating melodic phrases or playing with yearning, lyrical fervour, undercut by Few's splashy piano, the insistent bass strum and hum, Ali's cymbal-work and Juma Sultan's congas, with the use of a spacey delay sound giving them a Sun-Ra vibe (though it's easy to lose the detail of their accompaniment in the general exaltation). No matter how good the bass solos are, and meaning no disrespect whatsoever to Sirone, they're inevitably going to feel like a bit of an energy sapper after all the sound and fury that's gone before, though I suppose they add useful breathing-spaces, points of repose.

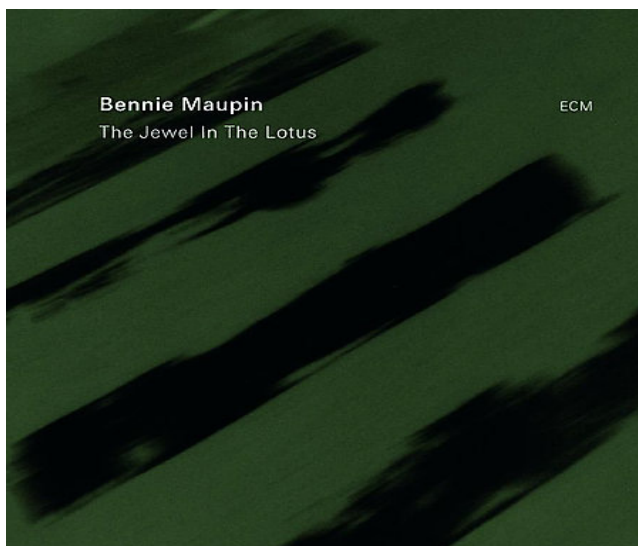
It might be helpful to note here that, while the record just drowns in passion, it's all the more effective for introducing variety in texture and mood, for mixing the bitter with the sweet and the rough with the smooth. As Howard notes in an interview, "if you've ever been in a black Baptist gospel church, and the choirs cut loose, you have this incredible harmony, and then you have the soloists, and the soloists go all the way out. And most of the preachers can sing too, and they'll go all the way out. But always within the context of gospel harmony." The balance between freedom and restriction, dissonance and harmony, noise and melody, is a difficult one to maintain, but the musicians manage it just about perfectly here.

I personally have a soft spot for another Howard album, the (still out of print) 'Space Dimension', which was cut a year later with a slightly smaller group, still including Doyle. It features some of the same tunes, but takes them even further out, and the contrast between Howard's smoother, more patient and lyrical approach and Doyle's straight-for-the-gut, throaty passion, is perhaps even more pronounced. The way they build from a simple, catchy groove to massive, noisy free jazz is a shining example of how powerful this stuff can be when done right, and has perhaps never been bettered.

That's just my personal, perhaps quirky, preference, though, and 'The Black Ark' still kicks substantial ass. As one blogger comments, "I would like to feel the way these musicians must have felt during and after this set... ALL THE TIME."



(Greene/Howard reviews by David Grundy)



BENNIE MAUPIN - *THE JEWEL IN THE LOTUS*

Label: ECM

Release Date: November 2007

Tracklist: Ensenada; Mappo; Excursion; Past + Present = Future; Winds of Change; Song for Tracie Dixon Summers; Past is Past

Personnel: Bennie Maupin: soprano sax, flute, voice, glockenspiel; Charles Sullivan: trumpet (tracks 2 & 3); Herbie Hancock: piano, electric, piano; [Buster Williams](#): bass; Freddie Waits: drums, marimba; [Billy Hart](#): drums; Bill Summer: percussion, water-filled garbage can.

Additional Information: Originally released in 1974.

Back in the early days, ECM were not afraid to experiment, releasing albums such as ‘The Paris Concert’, by free-jazz supergroup Circle, and Marion Brown’s very avant-garde ‘Afternoon of a Georgia Faun.’ That seems to be less the case now – what with the endless Dave Holland, Keith Jarrett, and Jan Garbarek releases, Manfred Eicher’s label could be said to define some sort of moody, European mainstream (although, of course, one must not forget the presence of Evan Parker on their artist’s roster, as well as, this year, the release of Roscoe Mitchell’s ambitious ‘Compositions 1, 2 & 3’). Still, it’s hard not to feel that the 70s was a time, unlike now, when ECM truly meant ‘Editions of Contemporary Music’ – that the jazz it produced was contemporary in the sense that it was cutting-edge.

‘Contemporary’ is maybe not an appropriate word with which to describe Maupin’s luminous, lovely album, however, for, though frequently experimental, and owing little to predecessors, it has that ‘timeless’ feel about it that is a true sign of great art. As well as being the first of its kind, it’s also the last: it doesn’t seem to have had any followers, as even the musicians themselves went off on different paths – Herbie Hancock continuing the march that would lead to disco and to superstardom, Maupin following his mentor into slightly jazzier funk on records like ‘Slow Traffic to the Right’.

Probably the most obvious musical connection, in terms of the actual sound of the album, would be Hancock’s Mwandishi sextet, and his playing here echoes the feel of that band, as he adds spare acoustic piano and spacey, high-pitched, glistening keyboard touches. Of course, the year before ‘Lotus’ was released, he had progressed on to his slicker, less spacey Headhunters funk, and Maupin had taken the trip with him; his squalling soprano boosted the record’s jazz content, while millions heard his tenor on ‘Chameleon.’ But, for me, it was always the moody bass clarinet he provided for the album’s closer ‘Vein Melter’ that really hit home, and, here, he extended that atmosphere even further into realms which were quite abstract, introspective, lyrical, sometimes quite frightening.

It’s easy to deal in abstractions, vague metaphors and similes, when writing about this music, for the sound itself encourages such an approach. As one reviewer says: “structures and silences, form and emptiness, pulses and flows: it is like sensing something in peripheral vision but when turning to focus, the impression disappears.

Always interesting, often surprising, sometimes frustrating, the CD is out-there and yet in-here.” This picks up on an important point: that, while ‘Lotus’ seemed like an avant-garde jazz record in some respects, overall it stood outside the free jazz and free improv camps, because of the emphasis on melody and the preponderance of sheer prettiness. You never feel, at any moment, as if this is a context in which Pharoah Sanders could start his multiphonic screaming – it’s all much more low-key than that, and while dissonance is not excluded (most notably, Maupin’s grave Tibetan temple vocals and anguished bass clarinet on the suitably-named ‘Excursion’), this is not ‘fire music’ in any respect. At a time when ECM had not yet formulated its particular style, to the extent that it has today, this record could be seen to point the way to what was to come – yet it evades categories, evades genres, evades being easily pinned-down.

Airy soprano melodies; loose, impressionistic, percussion; long, held flute tones; marimba vamps; two drummers swirling around in different stereo channels, never playing the same thing, but always countering and complementing each-other. A Downbeat magazine critic wrote that, “a more selfless album is hard to imagine” – though he could solo ably and strongly in the jazz idiom, Maupin’s style was never really about virtuosity, never really about how quickly he could run through the changes. Instead, he concentrates on colour, on texture, and if this means that he merges into an ensemble whole, leading from the inside of the band rather than from the front, so be it.

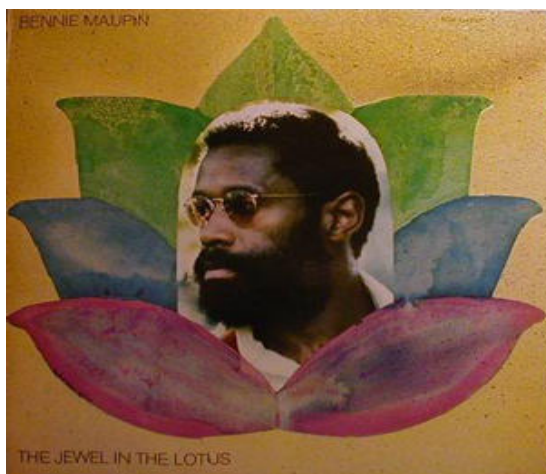
‘Ensenada’, the first track, is my highlight of the whole record. It opens, appropriately enough, with six seconds of silence, and, from there, it crawls, emerges, evolves – fluid, slippery sea-life before it’s become solid animal, flesh and bone. Buster Williams sets up a gentle rolling motion on bass, which is picked up on by Freddie Waits on marimba and Maupin on glockenspiel, while Hancock concentrates on picking his way through the texture with carefully-placed repeated figures, sometimes just single notes, sometimes melodic or rhythmic phrases – though he’s still recognisably himself, it is somehow unlike any of the playing from the rest of his career. The whole experience has what can only be described as a cinematic quality to it: that moment during a film when the narrative pauses and the protagonist moodily observes sunset becoming dusk out of a moving car traveling down a deserted highway.

Most of the pieces follow a similar pattern: build-up, tranquil melody stated by Maupin on soprano or flute, perhaps a solo or some ensemble colouring, re-statement of melody, fade to nothingness. While the relentlessly chilled atmosphere could become enervating, the two tracks with trumpeter Charles Sullivan up the ante: the aforementioned ‘Excursion’, and ‘Mappo’, reminiscent of Pharoah Sanders’ ‘Astral Travelling’ in the way the group first imply then finally state a theme – a novel way of treating melody, as if it was organically evolving out of ensemble interplay, rather than a pre-constructed jazz ‘head’. (Incidentally, ‘Mappo’ is a Buddhist term referring to the current 10,000-year period, a degenerate age during which chaos will prevail and the people will be unable to attain enlightenment through the word of Sakyamuni Buddha. Hence, perhaps, the more troubled atmosphere).

A blow-by-blow account of the record wouldn’t do it justice – it’s something you have to hear for yourself before you can fully grasp its intricacies and special wonders. I strongly urge you to seek out and explore ‘The Jewel in the Lotus’ for yourself.

Incidentally, the reissue has dispensed with the original, slightly dodgy cover art (which showed a photo of the bearded, sunglassed Maupin, superimposed onto the

middle of a rather crude, collage-like drawing of a lotus)). Mind you, I'm not sure the alternative's a vast improvement, substituting instead a rather grey, drab, 'moody' design (is it me, or do all the ECM covers virtually indistinguishable nowadays?). Judge for yourselves: here's the original cover:



(Review by David Grundy)

CHARLES MINGUS SEXTET - *CORNELL '64*

Label: Blue Note

Tracklist: (DISC ONE) ATFW You; Sophisticated Lady; Fables of Faubus; Orange was the Colour of Her Dress, then Silk Blue; Take the 'A' Train. (DISC TWO) Meditations; So Long Eric; When Irish Eyes are Smiling; Jitterbug Waltz.

Personnel: Johnny Coles: trumpet; Clifford Jordan: tenor sax; Eric Dolphy: reeds; Jaki Byard: piano; Charles Mingus: bass, vocals; Dannie Richmond: drums.

Following up from 2004's excellent Monk/Trane album, Blue Note hit re-issue gold again with something from a more documented period that nevertheless retains considerable freshness. In this case what we hear is a very early performance by the Mingus group that played a well-known concert at New York's Town Hall before embarking on a major tour of Europe.

Along with the reissue of 1965's 'Music Not Heard at Monterey...', there is an embarrassment of riches from this extremely fertile period – what will make Cornell '64 stand out mightily in the Mingus discography is, simply, the fact that the performance is so very good.. There is none of the workshop approach heard on 'Music Not Heard at Monterey', none of the berating his sidemen: just two hours of inspired, fantastically exciting creative jazz.

The sextet was formed and played a two-month engagement at the Five Spot, and during this time Mingus composed several new pieces that would be heard widely on the group's Town Hall concert and the subsequent European tour. They never recorded a studio date, leaving behind only a few live recordings. The Cornell recording, an excellent performance that clocks in at over two hours, was lost history, unknown to discographers and historians until Sue Mingus recently unearthed the tape. One can only wonder whether any of the students in attendance that evening remembered this performance and its brilliance.

It all opens with a solo by pianist Jaki Byard, his own composition entitled “ATFW You” (ATFW standing for Art Tatum/Fats Waller). It’s a nice demonstration of his ‘total pianism’, an approach he shares with later musicians Don Pullen and Dave Burrell: the ability to move from style to style seemingly at will, but without seemingly wilfully over-eclectic. On this particular piece, he mixes florid technical flourishes and with ‘outside stride’: it points the way from the past history of jazz to its present and future, all of which were of supreme importance to Mingus.

The bandleader himself solos next, performing a warm and lyrical version of Ellington’s ‘Sophisticated Lady’ with only light chordal accompaniment from Byard. The real meat of the program begins with the last three tracks on Disc One and continues through the first two tracks of Disc Two. ‘Fables of Faubus’, Mingus’ outspoken political rant inspired by the Little Rock school integration incident, is given a heavy workout, with a lot of room for the musicians to stretch out. Johnny Coles plays the first solo, firing long salvos of eighth and sixteenth notes against the ever-more-agitated background until the rhythm section drops out and the trumpeter ushers in a sultry, bluesy line. Byard throws in everything but the kitchen sink, offering quotes from ‘Yankee Doodle Dandy’ and Chopin’s ‘Funeral March.’ Following Mingus’ bass solo, Dolphy takes it out with some deft bass clarinet work. Clocking in at twenty-nine plus minutes, it’s a knockout performance of one of Mingus’ best known works.

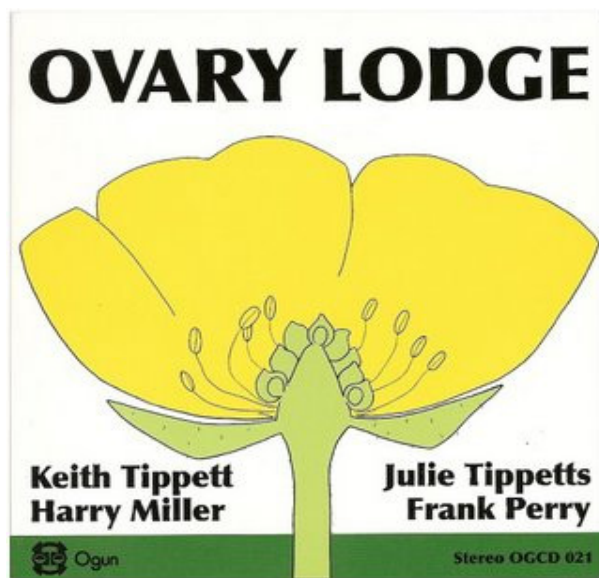
‘Orange Was the Colour of Her Dress, Then Blue Silk’ is one of the new numbers Mingus had been working on. The group had worked this one out during their Five Spot run, and the performance here is perhaps the best of the live performances they recorded. The composition stands as one of Mingus’ most beautiful, with its dusky blues motif. Mingus can be heard urging both Byard and Dolphy on during their solos, and it is magnificent to hear the great man so ebullient. The group ends Disc One with a rousing, rollicking version of ‘Take the ‘A’ Train.’ The arrangement shifts constantly, taking us on a train ride through the history of jazz, as Byard again treats us to a stride interlude followed by energetic solos from Dolphy, Mingus, and drummer Danny Richmond. As always, Richmond was right on target, giving Mingus’ compositions the right amount of swing and kick at the right time.

Disc Two opens with the half hour ‘Meditations’ (also known as ‘Meditations on Integration’), demonstrating once more Mingus’ passionate engagement with themes of injustice and racial inequality. ‘So Long Eric,’ another lengthy new composition, was a celebration of Dolphy’s tenure with the band. Dolphy had decided to remain in Europe following the group’s tour there; sadly, only months later he would pass away, making this piece more of a funereal air than was intended at the time. The group lightens up at the end, performing ‘When Irish Eyes Are Smiling’ in honour of St. Patrick’s Day (surely the only time), and closing with an energetic ‘Jitterbug Waltz,’ highlighting the influence of Fats Waller influence, and bringing things full circle, as we recall Byard’s opening stride-piano feature.

‘Cornell 1964’ is a true gift to jazz lovers and Mingus fans. Had this recording been released many years ago, it would already have taken a deserved place as a crown jewel in Mingus’ discography. Fortunately, its rediscovery allows all of us to enjoy a piece of jazz history that is as entertaining and fulfilling as it is historic.

While the sound quality is not exemplary by any means and while similar material from this time has been available (‘Town Hall Concert 1964’, ‘Mingus In Europe Vols 1 and

2' and 'The Great Paris Concert') 'Cornell 1964' is still a major release. At over 130 minutes and with extended versions of 'Fables of Faubus' and 'Meditations' clocking in at 30 minutes each, this is a full blooded exposure to the music of one of the key innovators in jazz.



KEITH TIPPET - *OVARY LODGE*

Label: Ogun

Release Date: June 2007

Tracklist: Gentle One Says Hello; Fragment No. 6; A Man Carrying A Drop Of Water On A Leaf Through A Thunderstorm; Communal Travel; Coda

Personnel: Julie Tippetts: voice, sopranino recorder, violin (Er-hu); Keith Tippett – piano, harmonium, recorder, voice, maracas; Harry Miller: bass; Frank Perry: percussion, voice, flute (Hsiao), organ (sheng)

Additional Information: Recorded live at Nettlefold Hall, London SE27, August 6th 1975, and originally released in 1976. Not be confused with the group's second album, of the same name, released by RCA in 1973.

I remember, looking at the original sleeve of the third album by Ovary Lodge back in 1976, thinking that London SE27 must be in the exotic depths of nowhere. You never saw live albums recorded in places called Nettlefold Hall in such a remote-sounding district as SE27. In conjunction with the earthly unearthly music which the sleeve housed I got the impression that this release emerged, dripping, from the depths of nowhere.

Well, life teaches you a lot of things; and I now find that Nettlefold Hall is situated in West Norwood, at the top of Norwood High Street in a building which also houses the local public library, and moreover is located about 10-15 minutes' walk from where I currently live. That knowledge hasn't rationalised the music in any sense; listening to it now, the latest instalment in Ogun's brave and, I am glad to say, increasingly frequent reissue programme, it still sounds like nothing else in music, either then or now, and moreover, Liz Walton's modestly controversial cover design, which, shall we say, interprets the group's name literally, still sticks out of the HMV record racks like a strangely smiling beacon.

Ovary Lodge began life as a trio, fronted by pianist Keith Tippett, in which he could exercise his free improv inclinations and perhaps catch his breath after the epic adventure of Centipede. The other key member of this initial grouping was percussionist Frank Perry; and the term "percussionist" undersells him sorely, since he was, in both appearance and outlook, New Age a generation ahead; deeply spiritual with a tendency towards the liturgical, his "kit" famously took several hours to assemble and disassemble, featuring multiple "little instruments" as well as the more familiar drum set-up, eventually expanding to incorporate Tibetan bowls, rows of wine glasses, huge ritual gongs and authentic Buddhist temple bells. This tended to incline group improvisation towards the meditative, the sustained tones, an essence of contemplation.

Whereas the group's first two albums, both recorded for RCA, carried the impression of free jazz plus New Age without the two quite uniting, their third – which, nearly needless to say, was eponymously titled – sees the group finally achieving a true fusion. By now Julie Tippetts had joined, and original bassist Roy Babbington had left to concentrate on Soft Machine and the BBC Radio Big Band, but not necessarily in that order; in came the ever-reliable Harry Miller. So we have a quartet which ostensibly consists of vocals, piano, bass and drums, but that doesn't even begin to tell the story.

Influenced perhaps by the AACM, and wary of coming across as too virtuoso or "learned," Keith, Julie and Frank all made a point of doubling up on auxiliary instruments, not all of which they were intimately acquainted with (at least, not at that stage); so Chinese flutes, school recorders, various types of Oriental violins and sundry percussion and vocal chants all have a part to play in expanding the palate of the music.

The opening "Gentle One Says Hello" sets out their template, and, once again, that of New Age at least a decade ahead of its guiltily opulent wallpaper status; here, however, there is a tangible sense of spiritual questing, with all four offering long extended drones, slowly intertwining, Keith issuing ominous low piano chordings, Julie switching from scampering sopranino recorder to sustained vocal lines, Frank's ceremonial percussion solemn as a salamander, Harry's stern bowed bass holding it all together; the vocal interaction between husband and wife (Keith and Julie) is very affecting indeed.

But, when needs must, they can also roar. "Fragment No 6," opening with Miller in Mingusian mood, cheerfully double-stopping his lines and setting the tempo, explodes into violent freedom, but it's the ecstatic vibrancy of mutual discovery that powers the performance rather than anything destructive; Julie shrieks, yells, harrumphs and croons orgasmically against Keith's furiously criss-crossing, and sometimes colliding, piano lines, Miller and Perry pushing the intensity as far as it can travel, and then further; at the four-minute mark the band appears to **COME** but that soon settles, but the building up starts again and gradually everything fuses together in a gargantuan and glorious noise – Julie working up to a scream, Keith practically pummelling the keyboard with his bare fists, and just before eight minutes Perry starts lashing his Tibetan bells and gongs like the volcano of punctum and all four miraculously **BLOW UP** in one, long, sustained, staggering **ORGASM** which, if you know what I mean, and of course you do, goes beyond "music." The tide recedes, they retreat to a modal minor meditation, the track fades. No doubt the absence of this record from the public catalogue for nigh on three decades has given rise to the distorted fantasy that British free improvisation in the mid-seventies was going nowhere (as though the Incus releases of that time were not demonstrable enough proof to the contrary); newcomers will hear this and breathe bangles of radiant wonder.

Side two (as the old vinyl edition had it; tracks 3-5 on the CD) begins with the nearest thing to a groove on the record, with the fantastic haikuesque title of "A Man Carrying A Drop Of Water On A Leaf In A Thunderstorm." Here Miller thrums out a solid bass riff as a crazed violin (I think played by Perry) starts off zigzagging in the Ornette tradition before settling on a droopy cyclical three-note loop in the venerable Tony Conrad/John Cale eternal theatre drone style which I am convinced subsequently cropped up on more than one "pop" or "rock" record, though I cannot currently recall which one(s), through which Keith and Julie provide very clearly defined recorder and

vocal lines, Keith even resorting to shaking a pair of maracas and uttering Apache war whoops at the track's climax.

"Communal Travel" at nearly eighteen minutes is the album's centrepiece, and here the group achieves its ambition of concealing ego in favour of a collective soul, everyone enmeshed so closely that eventually it is impossible to tell who is playing, blowing, hitting or singing what (apart from Miller, who with dogged glee sticks to bass and nothing but bass throughout the entire record). With its endlessly inventive intersections of flutes, voices, chirrups, high tones, low pulses, delicate harmonium and a plucked piano interior which could practically be a harp, it is a logical if unlikely blood sister to the Brotherhood's "Night Poem"; there is no central theme or riff diving in and out of the sonics here, but the atmospherics are beautifully handled and always on the edge of urgency – no surprise that Miller's bass is the key anchor in both pieces – so that when the thrashing climax does eventually arrive, it doesn't feel artificially reached but the most natural of conclusions; after that there is nothing left to say other than a minute-long "Coda," where Keith, Julie and Frank's voices harmonise, ascending higher and higher like nasturtiums towards a welcoming sun before they collectively squeal and ascend to the heaven of earthly revelations. Clearly, on the evidence of both this and the "new" Keith Tippett record ('First Weaving – Live at Le Mans') the spirit of '67 survives in surprising but utterly truthful ways.

(Review by Marcello Carlin: originally posted at 'The Church of Me' blog - http://cookham.blogspot.com/2007_07_01_archive.html)

In Brief

Reviews by David Grundy unless otherwise indicated

PETER BROTZMANN – *THE COMPLETE MACHINE GUN SESSIONS*

Just a quick note about this one, which consists of already available material brought together for the first time – the original album, and alternate takes, plus the live version Brotzmann and co. performed the same year, released as 'Fuck de Boere'. Pretty essential stuff – a statement of protest, of collective chaos that finally descends into warped Lionel Hampton big band riffs, it's easily Brotz's best-known work – and probably still his best. If you haven't got it, then this box-set should be seized on straightaway. RHWARRRRR! SCREEEEE! SSSSSSSSHOOM!

DON CHERRY – *LIVE AT THE CAFÉ MONTMARTRE 1966 (Vol. 1)*

Perhaps Cherry's most interesting period, between the famed collaborations with Ornette and the later world music phase, this finds him throwing out some heavy free jazz. Captured on tape by Danish radio in 1966 and now released on ESP Disk, this one features Cherry and Argentinian, flame-throwing tenor player Gato Barbieri in front of a European rhythm section, playing a flowing set of suite-like performances. This is music that skitters and nods, disassociates and coheres, twitches and lags, floats and swings. Snatches of melody appear (including everything from themes Cherry learned from Ornette Coleman to the Tijuana Brass's contemporaneous hit *A Taste of Honey*) over itchy rhythms, only to give way to other melodies and rubato space-outs.

Cherry's self-described "cocktail" approach to performance is one that rock bands like the Grateful Dead would adopt in coming years, but in 1966 Cherry was all but alone

on the cutting edge of this kind of seamless, morphing performance. Karl Berger's vibes lend the whole affair a mid-1960s, *Our Man Flint*, cool as ice, feel. Perhaps not quite as compelling as the records like *Complete Communion* that Cherry cut for Blue Note around this time, but worthwhile stuff all the same.

ANDREW HILL – *COMPULSION*!!!!

At last, one of Hill's best records get the RVG treatment, and about time too. Perhaps the most avant-garde he ever got, it's rich and dark, moody and intricate, rising to great peaks of dissonant emotion and falling away into subdued musings. Like the best of Hill's music, it asks more than it answers: there's something unsettling and unresolved about both compositions and improvisations. Free jazz blog destination...out blog describes the title track thus: it contains "the most glorious four minutes of Andrew Hill's entire career." I personally have a soft spot for the album closer, the gorgeously dark and moody 'Premonition', but the whole thing's pretty special, really. John Gilmore takes rare sideman duties away from Sun Ra, and is perhaps the star of the album, on tenor and on bass clarinet. The much-maligned Freddie Hubbard once more proves adept in a free jazz context, bassists are Cecil McBee and Richard Davis, drum chair is occupied by Joe Chambers, Nadi Qamar pops up on various African percussion instruments, and Renaud Simmons provides extra rhythmic ballast on congas. Essential listening.

NORMAN HOWARD - *BURN, BABY, BURN!*

If you can, try to get hold of this record (available on iTunes). It brings long-lost and/or long-forgotten music by Norman Howard, who used to be a trumpeter with Albert Ayler, recorded in '68 with Joe Phillips on sax, Walter Cliff on bass and Corney Millsap on percussion. And it's completely remastered on top of it. It's free jazz at its best, not far removed from its cradle, and the sheer raw power, the emotional expressiveness, the anything-goes-attitude are truly magnificent. But it's not a free-for-all blowing contest; the music is controlled without being too composed, opening up full of possibilities, expressing basic emotions such as anger, sorrow, joy too at moments, with a refreshing directness and musicality. The drums and bass are still strongly anchored in hard-bop, but the trumpet and sax screech, swirl and circle around each other at times without restraint, or in close unison carrying the tune. At other times they both weep in sorrow in long melodic lines over Cliff's arco bass, as in "Sad Miss Holiday", one of the longest pieces and definitely one of the highlights of the album. The whole album is great without any weak points. It is coherent, visionary, powerful, emotional, expressive ... in a word: fantastic! We love ESP for digging this one up and releasing it again. Respect! **(Review by Stef Gijssels)**

STEVE MILLER / LOL COXHILL – *THE STORY SO FAR.../OH REALLY?*

There's a revealing moment in the Steve Miller interview contained in this set's booklet, as he explains the reasons of a lengthy withdrawal due to a profound dissatisfaction with his technique. "I was hearing music that I couldn't play", says the late pianist. This tells everything about Miller's honesty, while also indicating what every artist should do when they feel that inspiration is not coming in the right way. Still, this double CD is another important item in Cuneiform's history of relevant retrievals of forgotten materials and deleted releases, as it puts back in availability two long out of

print collaborative LPs recorded by saxophonist Lol Coxhill and Miller in the early 70s, which remained practically covered with the sand of oblivion until now. As it often happens with reissues of obscure records, no master tapes were available; the copy on CD derives from a vinyl-to-disc transfer with various kinds of digital cleaning. Assuming that, since you're reading this website, you know who Lol Coxhill and Steve Miller are (...and if that's not the case, I can't certainly narrate their careers in pills in the space of a review - surf the web!), the material comprised here owns that fascinating aura, halfway between nostalgia and youthful enthusiasm, characterizing most of the Canterbury-related expressions of that era. Besides the ingenuous purity of the duo improvisations, one can already catch glimpses of Coxhill's future developments as a solo performer, Miller complementing his "absolutely free" explorations with phraseologies whose structure is evident - those technical habits that he came to hate, indeed. For collectors and avid fans, there are good portions of previously unreleased goodies, including live recordings (in glorious mono) and 20 minutes from the "proto-Hatfield and the North lineup of Delivery" (Miller and Coxhill plus Phil Miller, Pip Pyle, Richard Sinclair and Roy Babbington). Those who are into this stuff will enjoy this one a lot, treating the lo-fi quality and the frequent naïveté as archival manna. **(Review by Massimo Ricci)**

SUNNY MURRAY – *SUNNY MURRAY*

A fairly typical ESP blowing session, this one's interest lies in the bonus interview material with a charming and loquacious Murray. Recorded in 1966, the music itself features a two-sax frontline: Byard Lancaster and the little-known Jack Graham are the men screaming away, alongside the excellent Jacques Coursil on trumpet, and bassist Alan Silva. Murray, as you'd expect, keeps things very loose, and things are darker and more abstract than the Ayler group: the folky themes are gone in favour of darker territory (despite the fact that one of the track is called 'Hilariously', it sounds far from hilarious – and it's soon joined by another piece called 'Giblet'). Still, it's not the most essential of the recent batch of ESP re-issues; go for the Burton Greene or Norman Howard first.

EVAN PARKER/ GEORGE LEWIS / BARRY GUY/ PAUL LYTTON – *HOOK, DRIFT AND SHUFFLE*

Hook, Drift & Shuffle is a 1983 performance originally released on the Parker/Derek Bailey Incus label, recorded at the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels in the concert series directed by Godfried-Willem Raes. Everyone except Parker uses some kind of electronics: in addition to trombone George Lewis played a number of accessory and modifying devices, most of which were amplified; Barry Guy used amplification and electronics to process the sound of the bass; Paul Lytton used cymbals, gongs, woodblocks and amplified percussion.

The improvisations provide an early example of the timbres now associated with Parker's Electroacoustic Ensemble. Huge washes of semi-static transparent sound permeate, while transient peaks also abound; the opening moments of 'Shuffle' find a descending honk from Parker resonating with the electronics employed by Lytton and trombonist George Lewis, making his tenor sound bigger than life. As with the Electroacoustic Ensemble, there is the constant illusion of more musicians than are actually present, especially on the 34-minute 'Drift', a huge mass of intersecting plains of

drone with blurred edges. Even the pointillisms throughout, including rather astonishing chipmunk vocalizations, are subservient to drones, long shrill squeals and protruding growls of epic proportions that swell and subside.

The first five minutes of 'Shuffle' see the use of a what sounds like a Tibetan prayer bell, coupled with liberal use of space and very quiet, noise-focussed music (AMM-style), before Parker launches into his circular breathing soprano sax *moto perpetuo* routine, which some are becoming a little tired of now. Impressive though it undoubtedly is, he's essentially been pulling the same trick for years (in a way that perhaps goes against the constantly inventive nature of free improv, one could argue - he doesn't seem to want to use the soprano in the same varied way he does the tenor, which is a real shame, as it could so very easily be more than a one-trick instrument). Here, though, variety is added by Lewis' electronics, punctuating underneath, and contrasting with the business of the constantly flowing sax line (which nevertheless achieves a curious kind of stasis, and, in its interaction (or non-interaction) with the other instruments, a real state of tension. Compelling stuff.

SUN RA - NIGHT OF THE PURPLE MOON

This one's novelty value only: OK, well, I have to admit that I'm not a really a convert into the 'Church of Ra'. I know that he's been compared to Ellington, and that his music is both immensely forward-looking and 'futuristic', and full of the traces of jazz history, from stride piano to swing to African rhythms and percussion. But I still find it hard to get past the 'eccentric' tag, and the fact that, to put it frankly, some of his music is just deeply annoying (the title track of 'Space is the Place', with its endlessly repeated refrain and Ra's synthesizer-siren blaring away over muddy squawking saxophones and screeching vocalists, does little to rock to my boat). This is admittedly a different proposition to the Arkestra, however: mainly solo, it showcase Ra's keyboard skills, and his uniquely chunky, melodic sound. On here he gets to play the Roksichord – something like an electric piano, with a vague resemblance to a Harpsichord in its sound. Basically, what this boils down to is that we have some fairly traditional tracks played on a rather tinny-sounding keyboard. John Gilmore and Danny Davis also appear – the tracks with alto clarinet provide some welcome textural variety, and one of them, Ra's lovely composition 'Love in Outer Space', is perhaps the highlight of the record (though it's been performed better elsewhere). On a couple of pieces, including that one, Ra supplements the Roksichord with a Moog synth, to fill things out a bit, and the re-issue also includes some home recordings on Wurlitzer electric piano. It's all a bit tinny and plink-plonk for my tastes, but you may get a kick out of it, if you're in the right mood.

SUN RA – STRANGE STRINGS

Free improvisation recorded in New York circa 1966 and 1967. Apparently Sun Ra's only directions to his Arkestra were when to start playing and when to stop; as such, it represents an even more un-tethered approach than Coltrane's 'Ascension'. It's more on the side of weird, mystifying Sun Ra head-trip than free jazz blowout, though: 'lost in Space' best describes this music, thanks to close proximity of a microphone that amplifies horns and strings through reverb and distortion. The second track sees the use of a piece of sheet metal and some wordless, gargling vocals, the third a ukelin (a kind of bowed and strummed zither from the early 1990s), as well as a couple of other stringed

instruments: the dutar and bandura. Things reach the height of craziness in the final track, where Sun Ra ‘plays’ a squeaking door (with Mini-Moog) as accompaniment to strings and percussion. Gives new meaning to what the liner notes call “musical uncanny”. Completely mad, but oddly compelling. Hard to evaluate its significance: perhaps it’s the most innovative and important piece of improvisation ever recorded, perhaps the most ridiculous, perhaps both!

TRIO OF DOOM (John McLaughlin, Jaco Pastorius, Tony Williams) – *TRIO OF DOOM*

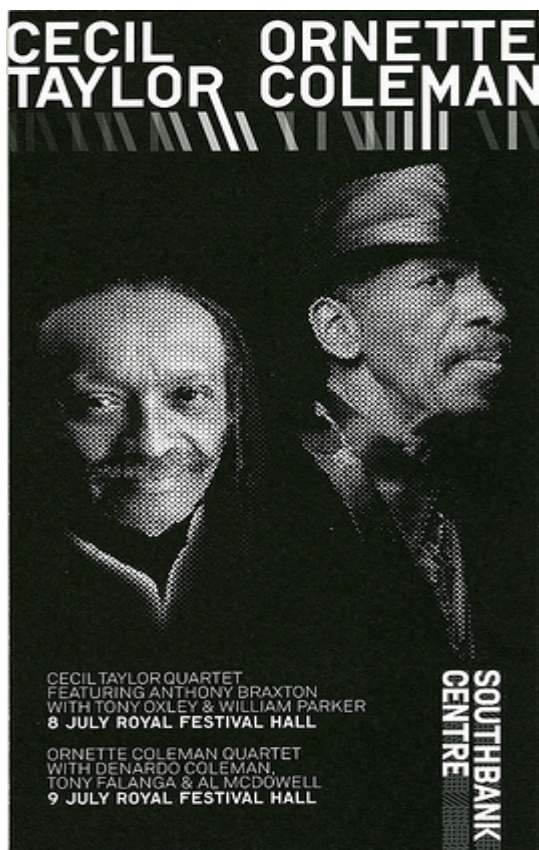
Heaven knows why McLaughlin’s finally given in and allowed these to come out, after stubbornly resisting for years. On paper, it sounded great – the ultimate fusion guitarist, bassist and drummer together as a power trio – but they just didn’t seem to hit it off (Pastorius’ drug habit was probably the main reason). After a calamitous live set at a gig in Cuba, they tried to re-record the material in a studio, but that attempt proved equally abortive, and the Trio of Doom died almost as soon as it was born – quite a well-chosen name, when you come to think about it!

On this album, we get the original live performance from the ill-fated Cuba gig, and the versions recorded at the equally ill-fated studio session, which ended with Tony Williams forcing Pastorius up against a wall and destroying a drum-kit on his way out of the studio. These were in fact the tracks released by Columbia at the time, on an obscure compilation called ‘Havana Jam’ (with audience applause added to make it seem as though they had been recorded live). The performances aren’t too bad, but given false starts and so on, it only really amounts to about half an hour of actual music. What there isn’t very interesting, especially when you consider what these musicians were capable of on their day. One for completists, and the curious, only.

GIG REVIEWS

- **ANTHONY BRAXTON/CECIL TAYLOR**
Royal Festival Hall, London (July 2007)
- **ORNETTE COLEMAN**
Royal Festival Hall, London (July 2007)
- **EVAN PARKER/TOM JENKINSON (a.k.a. Squarepusher)**
Queen Elizabeth Hall, London (July 2007)
- **PAUL RUTHERFORD MEMORIAL CONCERT**
Red Rose, Finsbury Park, London (October 2007)
- **CHARLES GAYLE**
UK Tour, September 2007 (Red Rose; Liverpool)
- **JOSHUA REDMAN TRIO**
The Anvil, Basingstoke (November 2007)
- **SONNY SIMMONS WITH TIGHT MEAT**
The Portland Arms, Cambridge (November 2007)

CECIL TAYLOR AND ANTHONY BRAXTON AT THE ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, 8/07/2007. Review by David Grundy.



"Given Taylor's holy role as the eternal outer curve of the avant-garde, it isn't his function to make things easy. When we can listen to him with half an ear, he's lost."

Gary Giddins

Sunday 8th July, 2007. On a day that Roger Federer was taken to five sets by Rafael Nadal in the final of the Wimbledon tennis championship, eventually winning through to equal Bjorn Borg's record of five successive Wimbledon titles, musical history was also being made. For the first time ever, two giants of improvised music, pianist Cecil Taylor and saxophonist Anthony Braxton, were playing together for the first time, in a quartet with bassist William Parker and percussionist Tony Oxley, at the newly refurbished Royal Festival Hall. Like Al Pacino and Robert de Niro, two doyens of the crime film genre who appeared in similar films and appealed to a similar audience, their meeting, when it came, took on the air of a momentous occasion even before it

happened. And, like Pacino and De Niro's shared screen time in Michael Mann's epic drama 'Heat', it turned out to be well worth the wait.

The Royal Festival Hall might seem like an odd location, and, indeed, I've read comments along the lines that it would have been better to give the group a week-long residency in a small club, rather than a one-off gig in a prestigious concert hall. Yet Taylor's leading collaborator Jimmy Lyons commented thirty years ago, "I think the music is to a point now where the nightclub can't handle it...It has to be pushed culturally as it is an advanced music; I don't think it can be appreciated right in" (quoted in Valerie Wilmer's 'As Serious As Your Life'). Perhaps the concert hall is actually Taylor's natural home, a sign that he has gained the prestige his music deserves – certainly, just as with Ornette Coleman, who performed at the RFH the next evening, it was a long way from his beginnings, where his music was constantly misunderstood, where other musicians would refuse to play with him, and where critical reaction was frequently hostile in the extreme. After all, wherever Taylor plays, he remains resolutely himself, making no concessions to popular taste or critical demand: he plays what he feels, and now he has the status to offer him some security, he has even more freedom to pursue his own unique path.

Aside from the choice of venue, questions remained about the music itself. How would Taylor's extrovert, flamboyant, no-holds-barred virtuosity sit with Braxton's more acerbic voicings? Would they attempt to find some sort of meeting ground, or would each

man go his own way, leaving an unresolved tension that, while superficially exciting, would also be extremely frustrating for both musicians and audience?

As it happened, these questions would not be answered until the second set. I sat down in my £35 seat (the combination of high tickets prices and travel costs meant that this was an expensive evening), and I have to admit that my heart sank when Polar Bear were announced as the opening act - I was expecting a marathon Cecil session! A quintet led by big-haired drummer Seb Rochford, with bassist Tom Herbert, tenor saxophonists Pete Wareham and Mark Lockheart, and electronics man Leafcutter John, their CD ('Held on the tips of fingers') is tolerable, but a bit too smart and vacuous for its own good. I did enjoy some of the stuff they were doing (Leafcutter John's 'solo' with squeaky balloons and some of the double-sax soloing 'freakouts'), but there are two fundamental problems with their music: (1) too often it veers towards empty, slick, groove-based material (tight, arranged, soulless) - though admittedly there is a strain of melancholy introspection which is quite attractive, if left somewhat underdeveloped (it was most present in the first two pieces they played). The line-up is interesting (two saxes, bass, drums, electronics - no chordal instrument), and the use of electronics could have made a difference, but in the end not that much was done with them, as regards texture - they tended to be used as either 'weird' noises or for repeating loops/grooves behind some of the more 'far out' stuff.

Which leads me to point (2) - though I found myself caught up in some of the 'skronk' solos by Pete Wareham in particular (echoes, however brief, of techniques used by Evan Parker and John Butcher, flitted through his playing), in the end (this was something brought into sharper focus by seeing Cecil afterwards), these avant-garde elements were being used in a fairly empty way - not as a logical, coherent, complete means of expression, a vocabulary with validity in its own right as emotionally fulfilling music, but as a device to seem 'far out' and a bit edgy. As if worrying that an audience might not approve of 'random loud noises' - that they might leave the building or something - there was always some sort of steady, repetitious pulse behind the 'out' sections (either bass, drums, or electronics). Strange considering that most had come to see two of the most challenging avant-garde musicians of the past fifty years...

And so on to Cecil...I'd been scribbling down notes (impressions, criticisms, etc) in the first half, and continued to in the second, albeit more haphazardly and frenziedly, as Cecil's music is so flexible, metamorphoses from one thing to another with such quicksilver speed, that you have to work fast to capture something you particularly liked! From those, and from what I remember, as well as some views from hindsight, here is what you might call a 'review'...

The performance can be divided into three main sections. Firstly, a duet between Tony Oxley and Taylor, consisting of two pieces (possibly with a composed piano part and improvised accompaniment on drums). Secondly, a bass solo from William Parker. Thirdly, the entire group took the stage. This dividing up of resources ensures both a variety of texture and a chance for all the musicians to showcase their abilities (if being a trifle pernicky I could say that Parker needed his solo feature, as you could barely hear him in the quartet music!).



There was an element of ritual from the start (though it wasn't that apparent late on): a poem reading by Taylor over loudspeakers (whether spoken offstage or pre-recorded was unclear) accompanied Tony Oxley as he wandered over to the drum set, his white hair glowing in the dim lighting, and sat down. It was like some sort of avant-garde play - this performative aspect is very important in a lot of the free music of the 60s and 70s (think Archie Shepp with his late 60s 'marching band' phase and pieces like 'Mama Rose', or Coltrane's callisthenics, or the Art Ensemble of Chicago, most notably), and also in Taylor's music. This connects to the African roots he emphasised, as well as to an almost surreal imagination, even mischievousness. Though humour is not the first thing people tend to mention when he plays, I think there is a kind of child-like joy in the sheer uninhibited nature of his work at times - particularly the record he did with the Italian Instabile Orchestra ('The Owner of the Riverbank'), of which there is a wonderful video clip on youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r21206DbBaE>). Anyway, Taylor duly capered onstage, shaking some handbells, like a shaman, or an elf...and sat down at the piano, and began to play.

The Taylor and Oxley duo left me somewhat unsatisfied. Taylor appeared to be playing composed music (he had a number of sheets of paper on the piano, presumably a score, and, when the first piece finished, he shuffled them around and pulled out another piece) - even if he wasn't, even if it was improvised, it lacked the fire and invention of his best work. It had the mournfulness that permeates all his music at certain points, but also a Debussy-ian sound to it, even traces of Romanticism. A certain phrase he played seemed directly reminiscent of 'L'Isle Joyeuse.' There was perhaps too much concentration on the middle register of the piano, and on repeated phrases (in a way that approached banality). The thought flashed through my mind that maybe it was the music of an old man, operating at a more subdued ('mellower'?) level than his previous work, which didn't bode well for the rest of the concert (happily, I was to be proved wrong). Even the fleet-fingered right-hand runs up the piano seemed more like Impressionistic excursions than white-hot flourishes.

Taylor and Oxley played two pieces, lasting in total about half an hour or 40 minutes (I forget exactly). They left the stage, and on came William Parker, a large, hulking figure (from a distance, a bit reminiscent of Mingus in build) dressed in a baseball cap and flamboyant multicoloured shirt. Hunching over his instrument, he gave a virtuoso showcase of technical dexterity with a real sense of ebb and flow, of structure and emotional logic, even though this was total improvisation (albeit he probably mulled over his plan of action beforehand). Alternating plucked, forcefully rhythmic bursts with bowed passages exploring high, cello-like sonorities and harmonics, sliding from song-like melody to buzz-saw helicopter imitation to a sad, almost pitiful whine, hinting at a middle-Eastern cadence at one point, turning cavernous, playing with dynamics, fading in and out on an obsessively repeated figure, before ending it all with final plucked notes drifting away like a death knell...

What with the restrained nature of the Taylor/Oxley duo and the inevitable echoes of classical music you seem to get in a bass solo, you could be forgiven for thinking that this was a concert of modern classical music (though of course generic boundaries should not be too much of an issue when assessing Taylor - they are far more likely to end up as a stumbling block than an aid). With the final section, though, jazz elements came far more to the fore, in the main because of Braxton's presence. A shudder of excitement as Braxton finally comes onstage (having briefly appeared earlier to position his five or so saxophones), the eccentric professor with his scraggy necktie. Electronics seem to be used (Oxley?), though these are thankfully kept to a minimum. The atmosphere is hushed, expectant. Cecil creeps, elf-like, to the piano, and, hearing the sinister, primal sound of Braxton's contrabass clarinet, elects to pluck the piano strings rather than striking the keys. A cautious start - the musicians feeling their way, the music emerging gradually, the tension building as Braxton punctuates his subterranean rumblings with high pitched squeals, a chiaroscuro technique of extreme contrasts, while Parker bows away and Oxley flitters round the drum set. The contrabass clarinet is, one senses, somewhat unwieldy as a solo voice, yet for sound colour, for texture, it serves a valuable function.

As they feel their way, it strikes me what a disparate bunch of people these are, yet how they manage to interact so naturally, to create a unified sound pattern - Taylor, small, nimble, twitching, forever active, inquisitive; Parker hulking over the bass, his face obscured by his baseball cap, tearing up and down the bass with his fingers or gently gliding his bow over the strings; Oxley white-haired, inscrutable, barely moving, apart from his hands, which are engaged in a kind of circular dance round his drum kit; Braxton, only half his face visible behind the enormous instrument he's playing, eyes closed in an agony of concentration. That's the real glory of free improvisation, I suppose - the fact that individuals can create something that's both convincing as a whole, as a unit (hence the name Taylor used for his bands, the 'Cecil Taylor Unit'), and as a statement of their individual personalities and styles. A truly democratic music that doesn't sacrifice emotional content for such ideals, but puts them into practice with often extraordinary results.

The opening section of rumblings, enquiries, hesitations, evolves into something more energised - Braxton switches to soprano sax, inclining his head over to one side as Taylor moves from inside the piano to begin striking the keys, clearly inspired by the

pianist's inventions as his runs begin to mimic Taylor's unstoppable note-flows. His playing becomes panic-stricken - a deranged, dying bird's screams as it flutters to death...or something more capricious than that, something even joyfully anarchic, impossible to pigeonhole - Oxley grins, his face finally betraying expression; Taylor looks over at him - a shared moment that betrays the high level of interaction these two have (which was somehow near-absent in their opening duo).

Braxton's moved on to alto - he never spends that long with one instrument, realising the nature of this music, which is of constant change, the possibility to go in any direction (or several at once...) without sacrificing flow or structure. It also shows how aware he is of texture, of the sound canvas the group is producing, and of how he can vary and alter this. He waits there, holding the instrument, eyes closed, nodding and shaking his head from side to side, immersed in what Taylor and the others are creating, waiting for the right moment to enter the fray. When he does, he produces a throaty, hard, almost baritone-like tone. A high-pitched whistling sound from an unknown source - electronics manipulated by Oxley, perhaps (these are often a feature of his solo performances). Braxton is now on soprano and the mood changes to one of introspection, Parker bowing instead of plucking his bass, Braxton's keening, melodic playing bringing out Taylor's innate melancholy lyricism.



He moves back to alto and the interaction between him and Taylor becomes clear, as he picks up on a melodic fragment tossed into the melting pot by the pianist one of his busy runs, expands on it and transforms it into something lyrical. Cecil insists on dialoguing with him, or beneath him - yet, as always, it's as much a dialogue with himself as with the other man, right and left hand existing as independent units, the left hand liberated from the supporting, chordal role it traditionally played in jazz, all part of Cecil's new conception of the soloist. Joe Zawinul's comment about Weather Report - "we always solo and we never solo" - could apply here, albeit in a slightly different way: in a sense, everyone is soloing at once, yet they are connecting to produce a convincing whole, and there is never a feel of egotism or

showing-off flashy virtuosity. Taylor and Braxton are trilling; Braxton seems on the verge of playing a line from one of the standards he interprets in solo recitals - say, 'Round Midnight'. How this could be considered 'intellectual', 'forbidding' playing should be a mystery to anyone hearing this man play.

Slight reservations remain in my mind, impressive though this is - a feeling that Taylor and Braxton are interacting on an almost superficial level, focussing on call and response and exchanging motifs, rather than the more organic interaction of Taylor and Jimmy Lyons. It's hard to tell, and it's essentially subjective anyway - what's for sure is

that even an inferior Taylor performance (by his standards), one that lacks that certain something his greatest work has, blows Polar Bear's first half set out of the water. This is truly on the edge - unpredictable, full of possibilities, of which only a few can be realised in one evening. A comment Elvin Jones once made about John Coltrane is relevant to this gig - it's like these men are sitting on a mountain of ideas and several flake off every few seconds.

After a more boisterous passage, the music quietens again - preparation, as it turns out, for the final assault. Oxley taps his drum, diminuendo...shhh, shhh, shhh...Patterns have started to emerge, fitting into the ritualistic element introduced by Taylor's and Oxley's initial entrances on stage: Braxton and Taylor throw lines and melodies at each other, the rhythm section going full pelt, before subsiding into calmer lyricism, Oxley dropping out, then surging up again as Braxton pauses, wipes his face with a large blue handkerchief, picks up a different instrument, stands there listening, then re-enters, his choice of notes both being shaped by and shaping the flow of the music...Maybe this is a system they worked out beforehand, backstage, in discussion, maybe it's more intuitive than that - whatever the case, it's utterly convincing, the music progressing like the rising and falling of the ocean tide.



Taylor suddenly solo - yes, yes, yes, he's found something - Braxton's nodding, bobbing, he knows it too - Parker plucks for his life. Oxley knows it - he's grinning, his hands moving more than ever, as if they have a life of their own. Taylor's runs won't stop, Braxton jumps into the stream of inspiration, his fingers fast, fierce, flinging off notes and sounds and colours...Whatever my reservations about what's come before, now I know, and they know that they've finally hit something, a sustained period of brilliance rather than the mere flashes seen previously - Braxton's circular breathing assault, the rhythm section boiling into a frenzy, Taylor inspired, his hands flying up and down the piano at near-superhuman speed....

Taylor ends it all with a short, sharp, dissonant chord. Inside me, a feeling both of elation at having witnessed such great music-making, and of regret at the fact that it was over. On the evidence of these last few minutes, if not the performance as a whole, the standing ovation the group received was well deserved - and where else in the world today could you find such music of such unadulterated sublimity, apart from under the fingers of Mr Cecil Taylor and Mr Anthony Braxton?



“At times, I felt that they had truly gone beyond the beyond – to echo Albert Ayler's famous phrase about his music, that it was about feelings, not notes.”
(Rod Warner on the gig at the ‘Words and Music’ blog (<http://soundsandtexts.blogspot.com>))



ORNETTE COLEMAN AT THE ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, 9/7/2007

For this concert, I decided to print two pieces from people who were at the gig. These originally appeared online: ‘centrifuge’ posted his comments on the now-defunct ‘Church Number Nine’ blog, while Rod Warner’s review is still available at ‘Words and Music’ (<http://soundsandtexts.blogspot.com>).

(1) Review by 'centrifuge'

[The first act were Byron Wallen's trio]. i have nothing against them personally at all, and they could have been any one of numerous well-turned-out british jazz groupings of the moment...[but] nothing they played made the slightest impression on me, and this had me meditating (again) on the whole business of commitment to art, to music in this case; these players have obviously worked very hard at their craft, have studied, at least two of them have written... they chose this music. somehow it seems hard to imagine that it could have chosen them. commitment, or just a choice of career?

the contrast with ornette coleman could scarcely be more stark, because this man was chosen seemingly from birth, and unlike many of his predecessors he has the happy distinction of being recognised and feted in his own lifetime. ornette is famous, and although he is now getting on a bit, his visits are not so rare that all jazz fans felt obliged to attend this gig (same is true of taylor and braxton). some couldn't justify the considerable expense of seeing him again... and for some there was even the worry "what if it's shit?" would that tarnish the memories of previous glories?

i didn't have the problem of worrying about that, because i had never seen him before and was determined that this was one guy i wasn't going to miss and regret not seeing.

it was billed as a quartet gig: so just the two basses, not three - i read somewhere tony falanga arco contrabass and greg cohen bass guitar (which seemed odd), then at the rfh it was listed as falanga and al mcdowell; in any case, the first name announced by the mc was that of charnett moffett, which brought audible surprise from most and delighted applause...then falanga, then mcdowell, so out of the blue we had the three-bass combo after all...

ornette walks on pretty slowly these days, leaving plenty of time for the audience to get excited, and his quiet words into the mic were in danger of being swamped - in any case i can't remember them precisely! but the gist was: he hoped this concert would bring us all the focus to do what we wished for most. that brought more grateful and polite applause (and probably a fair few raised eyebrows), and then - at least this is how i remember it - they were playing, and i was swaying in the aftershock of being thrown into the back of my seat by ornette's very first note. the power of it - of course he was playing straight into a mic, but still, everyone does. that the sheer directness of it was so unexpected: and it was all underway.

moffett was the secret ingredient here: how long beforehand it had been established that he'd play, i don't know, but he really enjoyed himself from first note to last. playing contrabass with pedals and effects, initially pizzicato but arco when the mood took him, and he was unstoppable, he just flung himself into every note. his interaction with falanga in particular was fascinating to watch - i know nothing about falanga at all, but he gave me the impression of having come through the classical route, plays mostly arco (though again was quite happy to switch and get stuck in there with both hands, usually when moffett was bowing and using effects), and i would guess could make quite a cerebral pairing with greg cohen, not exactly the down-and-dirtiest rhythm section this music has ever known... mcdowell, too, plays his electric bass sitting down and with a watchmaker's precision, so i'm guessing it made a bit of a change for them to

have someone like moffett come into the mix and tear it apart! falanga responded to everything moffett did, as well as initiating a few exchanges of his own - the two of them could have cooked all night.

because he revisited that pitch again at intervals during the set, i had the opportunity to reflect more on the nature of ornette's directness, which pierces the heart every time it is employed. he really means it, he really lives it and he keeps at it because he still really means it: he genuinely hopes to inspire others to speak their honest truth in the way he has always spoken his. that directness is intended to cut through layers of defence and deception, and it does. in truth not everything he played on the night was memorable - certainly nothing he played affected me so much as that first entry (but man, WHAT an entry), though to be fair there were enough distractions in which to lose oneself: he was perpetually in danger of being upstaged by the rampaging moffett, by falanga's continuing "string romance" with the latter and by his thrasher of a son, threatening with the kit to drown out anyone who didn't play up a bit... but distractions aside, ornette is an elderly man now and has to husband his strength. he still wields his triple axe, switching to trumpet and violin not just on certain numbers but whenever he felt like it, and his brass flutterings and scraped strings both weave themselves well into the fabric of the band, and he has no trouble cutting through it all with his alto... but for most of the concert i have to admit he was not the focus of my attention and i doubt this would have been the case in years (perhaps long) past.

if he keeps at it now, commits himself to touring and travelling when he could be (i presume) comfortably retired, it seems to be his honesty of purpose and the urgency of his message which keeps him going: people always need to be reached, the players can still benefit from the lessons, from the experience of playing with him, the message must be put across. and yet he never shouts, never even raises his voice... well, of course he does raise his voice, but he has a horn for that. and the message carries him in turn - his strength must be spent wisely but it is still considerable, allowing him to recover at once from heatstroke at the age of 77 and continue with a planned european tour almost immediately afterwards. this is a remarkable man, and i am, indeed, very glad i saw and heard him in the flesh.

"In contrast to the intensity of the Cecil Taylor gig from the previous night, it was like getting slapped in the face by a slab of pure melody, and I just felt fully on air..."
(Scott MacMillan at the 'Off Minor' blog (<http://offminor.purplebadger.com/>))



(2) Review by Rod Warner

The sky was darkening and it had rained a bit in the afternoon and I wasn't feeling too good but I made it back to the Festival Hall... Tonight, first up, the [Byron Wallen](#) Trio – an improvement on the previous evening's support act. More 'jazzy' - not that I am especially bothered about idiom - [Wolf Eyes](#) would have been a great start act in my book - but context is all... Yet...oddly enough, if Polar Bear had played tonight, maybe they would have fitted in better... does that seem overly perverse? It's a point I will elaborate on later...

Wallen opened on piano – a slow, ruminative and rolling broad-chorded piece to get his feet under the table, as it were – eventually joined by his drummer and bass player. He switched to trumpet for the second piece and most of the set – showing wide range throughout from bat-squeak to low growl – an interestingly large sonic palette edged with a supple yet vulnerable lyricism. His themes used simple fragments of melody but were effective and memorable, often pivoting on the bass to supply ostinatos drawn from the melodies which provided a level of continuity that he and the drummer weaved skilfully around. They played confidently, seemingly unawed by the occasion and went down well. A point: they come off the jazz tradition but have developed their own strong conception – Wallen has a penchant for themes that reflect his African heritage and allied socially conscious issues without beating you over the head – all the more effective perhaps. He utilised a shell (a conch?) at one point, for example, and produced a hauntingly beautiful sound that integrated with the piece rather than being some worthy World Music add-on. They used freedom and space and didn't sound like a bebop revival band or a group overconsciously trying to be accessible to a wider audience... this was mature stuff played with great ease and spirit... A band to check out further...

So: the house was well warmed up for the main event – Ornette and his ensemble, underpinned as ever by his son, the burly Denardo on powerhouse drums. Two bass players were advertised but he sported three – Tony Falanga and Al McDowell with Charnette Moffett added – one acoustic bass, one bass guitar, one electric standup. The sort of lineup that needs to be able to stay out of each others' way – which they pretty much did throughout. Falanga was mainly arco – one nice touch I noticed that showed the strength of his technique - and his hands - on 'Sleep Talking' (I think) when he held his thumb on a note for achingly long periods to create a bowed drone while using his fingers to trigger flurries of notes. Moffett arco and pizzicato, used his footpedals to good effect – I especially liked the wah wah combined with bow to create a swooning swooshing wave of sound. The bass guitar was played high up for most of the set, giving electric guitar figures – with some bluesy chording that reminded me of Jim Hall behind Jimmy Giuffre way back. McDowell drifted close to noodling a couple of times but in the main laid out some interesting and pointed lines. Denardo the grounding force – cymbals like razors, a strong flowing rhythm throughout – he's a heavy hitter, which is necessary, I figure, to keep this band on the track.

Ornette was the arrow – *saeta/cante hondo* indeed, a searing, wrenching all too human tone on alto, plus see-sawing freejazz hoedown on violin – hip yiha - and spare, smearing forays on trumpet, an instrument upon which he has always been at the very least interesting, in my opinion, and which he plays better than some would have you believe. Ok, he used some stock phrases on the sax – but they were his inventions to

deploy and he powered the ensemble onwards throughout, leading them accurately through those typically convoluted themes that stop and start and end so suddenly. Although the congregation is very much a democracy - as befits harmolodic metaphysics/theory, there is a lot of trust involved, shown by the way he lets his musicians run with the balls that are bounced out – backed by Denardo's rock solid rhythms. Operating on several levels, which is one of the fascinations of his music – his alto often riding in a slow drift as the beat doubles behind on drums and the others trade of fragments that slide off his themes. Never far from the blues, as evidenced by the loping dance through 'Turnaround,' a theme which locks him firmly in the back tradition to demonstrate where he came from -and the distance travelled. His present band represents something of a fascinating recapitulation of his career – from early freejazz breakthrough to Prime Time's electric weirdfreefunk – the electronic instruments are still there but not as dominant, the rhythms strong but suppler perhaps than the Prime Time experience – to his diagonal take on the european classical canon – a Bach cantata from Falanga that eventually mutated into – something else... His music has always been all-embracing and wide-open - so much to get in under the skies of America and beyond - and this performance amply demonstrates the point. Many of the freedoms he sought and discovered are created by the spaces that open between the different layers as much as by the overall direction(s) taken.

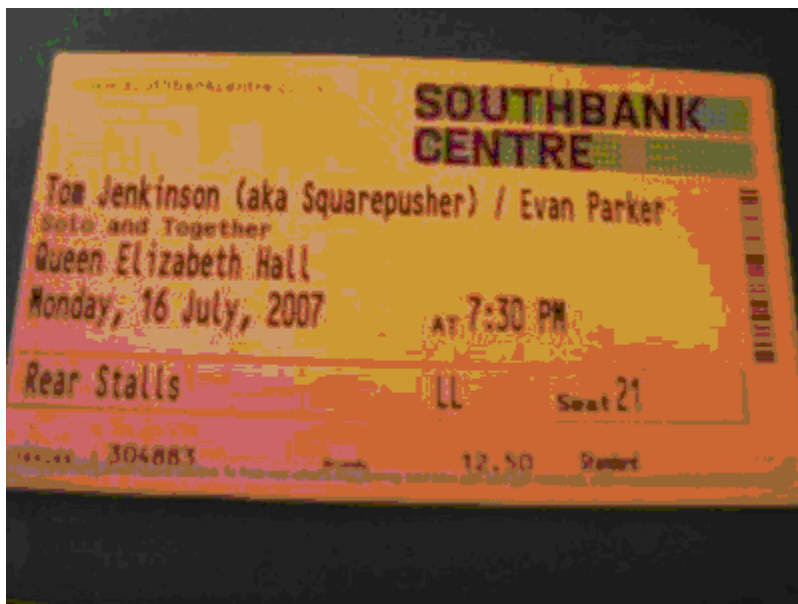
He came back to rapturous applause and gave his usual encore – 'Lonely Woman' – and no problem with that to hear again the hauntingly beautiful refrain – where Falanga's arco bass comes into its own, especially... The crowd wanted more, of course – but a seventy-seven year old can only give so much...

Last thoughts... interesting to consider Ornette with more of the emphasis now on being a composer and bandleader – the invention is still there with sudden flashes of the old left-field trajectories on saxophone, more so perhaps in the briefer but fascinating outings on violin and trumpet - but he didn't take any long solos tonight. His power on alto is still intact, however, marred slightly by a shrillness/distortion that crept in on some of the high notes and was more of a sound system problem – a reverse echo, oddly enough, of Anthony Braxton the previous evening who had been almost inaudible at first when he switched to alto. (Maybe they are still coming to terms with the acoustics of the new building?). This band serve as the perfect vehicle for him to ride out on with the overall fire of his imagination to drive it home. We came to praise Ornette and celebrate the fact that he is still with us and leading challenging lineups – this wasn't the heritage circuit. He deserved the warmth of the acclaim for what he has given – and what he gave this night – with such generosity.

A mind-blowing two days ...Ornette's music comes out of the blues, embraced electricity early on – and rock – and combined them better than most by keeping a cutting improvisational expansive edge that fusion in the main could not or would not attempt, so there was that sense of not being so very far from 'social' music, of engaging with popular forms in the same way that Miles Davis did. Taylor's muse took him down different routes. Can we say that Ornette was more linear, taking the older implicit – and explicit - freedoms of the blues into choppy waters, Cecil Taylor, with a pianist's conception, exploring – and shattering – harmonic forms with a denser formulation? Rhythm too – Ornette's was a freed-up bop rolling, Taylor's becoming a more abstracted pulse. But these visions are not mutually exclusive - Taylor uses melody more than you might think,

the call and response structures of his culture coupled to a sharp bluesy edge, and Ornette's ensembles achieve a thrilling complexity where the lines criss-cross through in often joltingly exhilarating counterpoints and spatial movements...

... the final point is that these giants are still with us and still indicating from different – yet surely compatible - positions the dynamic possibilities of freedom in music - and beyond. There are no narrow roads here...



**EVAN PARKER/
TOM JENKINSON
(squarepusher) -
SOLO &
TOGETHER,**

**QUEEN ELIZABETH
HALL, 16/07/2007.**

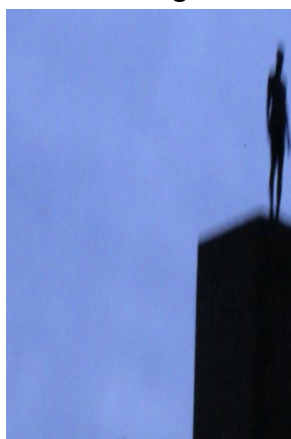
**Review by David
Grundy.**

The weekend after the historic meeting between Anthony Braxton and Cecil Taylor at the Royal Festival Hall, another intriguing pair was scheduled to perform at the South Bank, this time at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. And, while one of them, Evan Parker, was, like Braxton and Taylor, a veteran of the avant-garde jazz/improv scene, his playing partner, Tom Jenkinson (a.k.a. Squarepusher), was a far more 'mainstream' musician, though one with a highly subversive aesthetic. Along with Richard D. James (Aphex Twin), he's sometimes lumped into the 'drill n' bass' or I.D.M. ('Intelligent Dance Music') bracket – for those unfamiliar with the terminology, it basically means that he produces electronic music with enough beats and bleeps to keep any raver happy (and "dancing around like a chicken on fire", in Jenkinson's own words), but with plenty of dissonance, noise, and a dash of experimentation. Most importantly in relation to this particular collaboration, there's also a pronounced jazz influence, especially in his virtuosic bass playing, which he shows off from time to time – though he's got more in common with fusion-meister Jaco Pastorius than with free music bassists like William Parker or Sirone.

All in all, an unlikely pairing – whose idea was it? Maybe Jenkinson saw what Spring Heel Jack have been getting up to in recent years and thought he'd like to dip his toe into the waters too – maybe Parker, who's worked with SHJ, was interested in finding common ground with another musician coming from the electronic/dance music scene. But this was probably more than just a random collaboration (both men would seem to have enough integrity not to be thrown into something out of media hype – and in any

case, this didn't get too much attention in the press, though the hall was packed on the night). There is, though you might be hard-pressed to find it on first listen, a certain affinity between their musics, in intention if not execution: Tim O' Neil draws a parallel between Jenkinson's 'Ultravisitor', which he sees as an unsuccessful, "schizophrenic" attempt to fuse electronic and acoustic sounds, and Parker's 'Memory/Vision', which "bridge(s) the gap in a more intuitive manner...encourag(ing) the spontaneity of real-time interaction on the parts of both the electronic and acoustic portions of the composition."

Anyway, encouraged to go out of curiosity as much as a hope that anything genuinely interesting could be achieved (though of course I was hoping for that too), I made my way to the QEH. I can't say I got full value for money (when you include transport to and from London) – this was a pretty short concert, clocking in at around 70 minutes – and nothing revelatory happened to suggest that this is a collaboration with that much mileage in it, but it was intriguing enough nonetheless. Part of the problem was that Jenkinson restricted himself to the electric bass, discarding the electronics he normally deploys, which could have found common ground with Parker's own experiments in this direction, such as with his electro-acoustic ensemble. And, despite the fact that this was billed on the strength of being an unusual collaboration, they only actually played together for about 20 minutes: the first half was Jenkinson solo (playing four pieces in a 36 minute set), the second half Parker solo (a 20 minute circular-breathing showcase on soprano), then the two playing together (with Parker switching to tenor). Even though they received rapturous applause (coming from the Squarepusher fanatics, I somehow suspect, considering the fact that there were loud screams whenever he finished playing), they only came out for an extra bow at the end – no encore. I read a rumour somewhere on the internet that Warp Records was recording and videotaping the concert, so maybe you'll be able to hear some portion of this music in a couple of months – and maybe they'll work together a bit more in the studio (hopefully with electronics), but, on the night, I felt a bit short-changed, though it was certainly no disaster. Here are some more detailed thoughts on the music.



Though often linked with Aphex Twin, Jenkinson seems somewhat milder, less perversely weird, though he is liable to antagonize the audience ("I'm very into abusing the audience, whatever," as he told one interview), and is a pretty reclusive figure. On this occasion, he was businesslike – no showmanship, just a man with a bass guitar walking out onto a near-empty stage, acknowledging the raucous cheers of the audience with a gentle wave. Dressed in an open-necked shirt and suit trousers (virtually the same attire as Evan Parker – smart-casual, professional but not stuffy), he proceeded to play, standing still for the most part, occasionally taking a few paces to the side before returning to his original position.

His opening improvisation was lyrical and guitar-like, as was much of his playing in the first set – in a similar vein to 'Everyday I Love', the beautiful short piece that closes 'Ultravisitor.' Of course, there were elements of Pastorius – how could there not be? – but it was less flashy and less 'jazzy' in its idiom, more introspective than Pastorius, an effect complemented by the subdued blue on-stage lighting. Jenkinson exploited the deep, resonant tone of the bass, but played his (fretted) instrument with

more emphasis on chords than horn-like lines and runs. The mood was mostly one of gentle lyricism (in contrast to the harsh hyperactivity of something like ‘My Red Hot Car’, his best-known track), but there were louder sections, where, amplified by the sound engineers, he produced some loud and aggressive hard plucking sounds.

In the second piece, he alternated between bursts of loud, rock-inflected playing and lyrical meanderings. By this stage, I was beginning to have a problem – there was a lack of any real sense of development; instead, all we were getting was little snippets which didn’t coalesce very coherently (James Lincoln Collier makes a similar criticism of Miles Davis’ playing in his book ‘The Making of Jazz’). At one point, a song-like invention lead on to a more evocative, flowing passage that would have been at home on a film soundtrack. On the third piece, a muted opening saw more pronounced elements of jazz creep in, along with passages that reminded me of classical acoustic guitar music, before he went for a more prolonged virtuoso section, slapping the body and strings of the bass with relish to draw out some deep, throbbing, and sometimes very aggressive sounds.

Overall, however, it felt like that sort of music that might appeal to musicians for its technical prowess (and you have to hand it to him, he is a very good bass player technically) but lacks heart, or a clear sense of direction – to put it in it simply, noodling. Little bursts of his Pastorius stylings on records may be nice, but hearing him unadorned in this context made me realize how they need the innovative soundscapes he conjures up with electronics and beats to make them really work.



So, after a disappointing first set, I was expecting a lot more from the second half. Evan Parker duly obliged, delivering the sort of performance that has become almost routine for him now (I don’t mean to suggest that it was a routine performance – far from it, it was extraordinary and compelling, and he does it as well now as he ever has). Using circular breathing techniques, whereby the performer inhales through the noise, while air stored in the cheeks is exhaled, through the mouth, into the reed of the instrument, he is able to avoid the usual pause-driven nature of the solo, and instead create mesmeric instant compositions which paint a compelling musical landscape. Constant coils of motion are interspersed seamlessly with high-pitched squeaks, reminiscent of seabirds

circling over the rolling, endless beauty of the sea (a somewhat pedestrian and clichéd comparison, maybe, but one that really stood out in my mind at the time). He's developed a way of playing like two men, creating two parallel lines which are played in such close temporal relation that they seem to occur simultaneously. His left hand maintains a circular run, while his right hypnotically punches out a counterpoint, and the shrill bird-cries (harmonics?) pepper the mixture to add what is essentially a third line, which becomes more and more unearthly as he continues, now evoking flutes, violins, bird calls of course, but above all, he is playing SOUNDS – and sound is what Parker and many other free improvisers are interested in above all. About fifteen minutes in, I realize that he's been playing the same motifs for several minutes – producing a similar effect, now I come to think of it, to Terry Riley's classic minimalist works like 'A Rainbow in Curved Air' or 'Morning Corona' (from Robert Ashley's film series 'Music with Roots in the Aether'). I suddenly notice the feeling of a dance – is Parker playing Eastern European dance themes in the middle of the swirling vortex of sound? Even if that was just an auditory illusion, his improvisation did echo that moment when spinning dancers become whirls of colour only, moving so fast that their form becomes indecipherable and they appear as abstractions.



It was hard to see any similarity between this and the Squarepusher solo set, apart from the fact that they had been performed by two men standing on the stage of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, improvising solo and sharing the same bill. How would they interact? They seemed to be coming from completely different places – Jenkinson technically superb, showing off his chops in fast-fingered runs up and down the bass as well as playing lyrically, yet never really developing his fragments into a seamless whole, while Parker created music of great fixity, change occurring incrementally, imperceptibly, in a piece that felt static (in a good way) despite the constant motion. There were no pauses or discontinuities – just one wave of sound rolling round and round on itself and revising itself before going round again.

But here it was, the event round which the whole concert essentially revolved – the meeting of Squarepusher and Evan Parker. Jenkinson came back on stage (as usual, to tumultuous audience reaction), and Parker switched from soprano to tenor sax. As they

began, the bassist concentrated on busy rumblings beneath Parker's tenor chatterings, both creating a hyperactive, spidery, twitching dialogue. They seemed to be interacting well; Jenkinson initiated a crescendo motif, to which Parker responded, before taking that into a more hyperactive feel, which the bassist picked up on. He didn't seem overawed by Parker, which could easily have happened, considering his newness to the field of free improv, where Parker's attained near-venerated status – instead, the older man spurred him on to be much more adventurous and coherent than in his solo set, adapting to the rigorous demands of this style of music-making with aplomb. You could see him watching his partner, listening for the right moment to drop out and come back in again, what to play to complement the saxophone line, to create a separate line that was still in dialogue with the other yet had an independence of its own, that didn't solely on being complementary, on playing a supporting role (though if anyone could be said to have taken the lead, it was Parker). Certain stylistic tics showed Jenkinson's background – he would tend to play very fast repeated motifs beneath Parker's more abstract avant-gardisms, for example – but the music nevertheless had a natural ebb and flow to it, moving from hyperactivity to sparse moments where Parker's breathy sax floated over Jenkinson's clanging, bell-like bass. It all fitted Jenkinson's left-field image – near the end, he went crazy, hands going up and down the bass in a mad circular motion – but he didn't subordinate artistic integrity to wanky, hollow 'freakiness', and, as a result, this was compelling listening. Consequently, the applause when they finished, as so often happens in improv, quietly, after going through some gorgeous high, rippling, watery sounds, was well deserved.

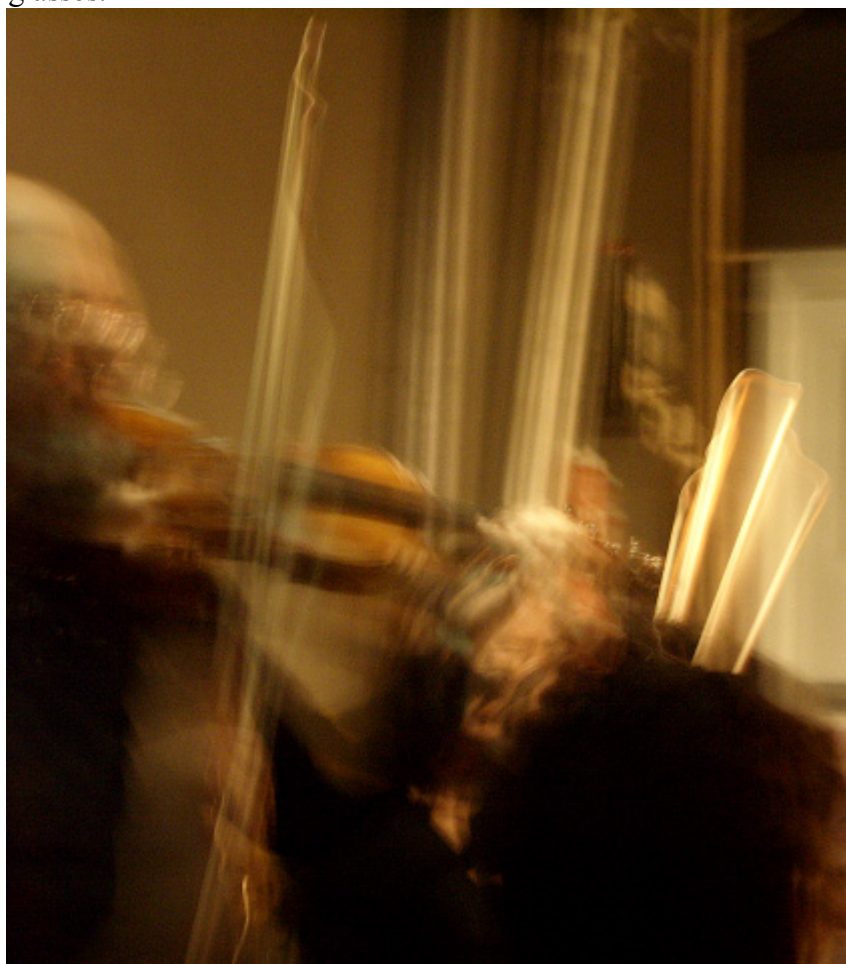


**PAUL RUTHERFORD MEMORIAL CONCERT
RED ROSE, FINSBURY PARK, LONDON, 24th October 2007.
Review by David Grundy.**

Journeying to this gig, I had that pre-concert feeling of anticipation, excitement, deriving from the fact that I didn't know what I was going to hear, even though I'd seen the programme, and I knew who was performing, so I had a general idea, given

familiarity with the personal styles and work of the players. Still, in classical music, no matter how revelatory the performance, however much a conductor or an orchestra or a soloist opens up new ways of viewing the work they're performing, it's always a pre-existing piece which doesn't change its essential character (except in very exceptional circumstances). By contrast, improv's essential character is that it is changing, unfixed.

Of course, any excitement I felt was tempered by the fact that this was a tribute to Rutherford: his loss weighs all the more heavily because of the neglect he suffered, both critical and commercial. It was at the Red Rose that he gave his last public performance, in a trio with Vervan Weston and Marcio Matios (both on the bill for this concert, although Matios was unable to make it in the end), and it was appropriate that the tribute took place here. Clearly, a big concert hall wasn't going to honour him – aside from Cecil and Ornette at the Royal Festival Hall, that sort of thing rarely happens. And perhaps it's a good thing: the working men's club atmosphere of the Red Rose provides a down-to-earth, non-elitist context. Intellectually rigorous (as well as visceral) music this may be, but high-flown tra-la-la it is not: it's made to the smell of stale beer, not to sparkling champagne glasses.



Above: violinist Philip Waschmann

The concert started at 7PM and finished around 11:15. A huge variety of artists had been squeezed onto the bill – all for only a fiver (concs), and, as you'd expect, the RR was pretty full. It's a tribute to the esteem in which musicians, at least, held Rutherford that so many of the great and good from the world of British jazz and improv

were all performing on the same evening – it really was what they call a ‘star-studded line-up.’ Because of this, there was a real sense of occasion, which at times threatened to become over-the-top, over-polemical, somewhat at the expense of musical considerations (as in Vervan Weston and Maggie Nichol’s fiercely Old Left ‘Political Duo’). Overall, though, the tone generally managed to avoid being too morbid or too hagiographical.

There were eleven different groups, climaxing with the London Improvisers’ Orchestra, which incorporated many of the musicians who’d previously been on stage in smaller groups. The first performance harked back to Paul’s jazz roots, playing in **Mike Westbrook’s** big band (which was a stamping ground for many of the finest British improvising musicians, of many persuasions – Alan Skidmore, Keith Rowe, Mike Osborne, Phil Minton, and John Surman, to name just a few). Westbrook sat at the battered old upright piano that had been dragged on stage for the evening (it made vibrating noises whenever he pressed a key). “Paul was a great player of the blues,” as he commented afterwards, and he played a piece which Rutherford had particularly enjoyed when with the big band, ‘Creole Blues.’ It was nice to be reminded how diverse his career had been (as has that of many of the people I saw that night) – an all-round musician, a man of enormous, multi-faceted talent. Joining Westbrook were Chris Biscoe, who took a relaxed bass clarinet solo with touches of Dolphy-esque fire, and Alan Wakeman, whose soprano sax solo Biscoe accompanied with drowsy bass clarinet shades, before Westbrook dropped out and the two horn players engaged in a duet which grew in intensity and volume, becoming progressively more ‘out,’ until the performance ended with a return to the blues theme. Was it just me, or did that old melody have a bittersweet, elegiac feel to it which perfectly suited the occasion? Whatever the case, it was a nicely-judged jazz performance which, I suppose, eased us in gently before the more abstract and experimental music to come.

Next up, another trio, led by another stalwart of the British jazz scene, **Harry Beckett**, veteran of Chris MacGregor’s Brotherhood of Breath and many other musical concerns. He led a punchy, no-nonsense fifteen-minute set with Tony Marsh on bass (a late replacement for cellist Marcio Mattios, who I’m sure would have given the performance an entirely different dimension) and Nick Stevens on drums. Physically, there was quite a contrast between the short, leather-jacketed, pugilistic-looking trumpeter and the polar-necked bassist (who reminded me somewhat of an ageing beatnik), but musically, they were completely compatible. Although more modernistic than Mike Westbrook’s trio, the rhythm section in particular gave proceedings a jazzy edge – sort of one step beyond advance bop, on the verge of settling into a groove but resisting it, scattering impulses. They provided an ever-changing backdrop to which Beckett responded, although I wouldn’t say that they were guiding him, as this was a grouping of equals in which each listened to the other. There was more space in the trumpet playing than in bass and drums – Beckett would maintain a silence, weighing up the situation before emerging in bursts of hard-edged brassiness, his tone with a low-edged vibration to it rather than the high, squawk more commonly associated with the instrument’s use in jazz. Marsh added virtuoso display: there was much bowing and hyperactive plucking, and, at one point, he played his instrument with drumstick brushes.



The third set saw yet more musicians who'd been active in the flourishing 60s and 70s scene (and are, of course, still active today): the husband-and-wife team of **Keith Tippett and Julie Tippetts**, joined by South-African drummer Louis Moholo-Moholo and trombonist Dave Amis. With his sideburns and waistcoat, Tippett is unmistakable – there's more than a touch of the Victorian eccentric about him, at least in appearance. Performing in a huge thick, heavy overcoat, and a scarf (which had to be fetched from an audience member before he would start playing), his touch on piano, by way of contrast, was frequently light and flowing. Just as the previous set had finished mid-phrase, so this one started without warning: Evan Parker was still on-stage to announce the band, when he realised that they had started playing behind him (the sound-check metamorphosing into the performance) and quickly moved out of the way. It began quietly, with Tippett's repeated arpeggios, and his wife's low-voiced vocal lament, moving on to skittish advanced techniques, complementary swells and growls from the trombone; some piano motorisms sparked a tempo change – but, as with all improvised music, such blow-by-blow description is only a very broad-brush account of the work. Taking account of every nuance and change and transition misses out the way that the piece had a real sense of structure, resulting from the musicians' decades-old, in-built discipline. Even an average performance will thus be nothing less than compelling – and that's just as well, as none of the music on the night hit any particular heights (which is not a surprise considering the packed schedule and the time-constraints this placed on the players).

From what was pretty much straight-ahead (if adventurous) jazz, each act was going further into the more esoteric realms of free improv, and the duet between trombonist **Robert Jarvis** and electronics man **Lawrence Casserley** had a very different feel to what preceded it. Both men had been members of Iskra Cubed, one of Rutherford's last projects (and, in fact, Jarvis had been employed on electronics in that role). Casserley's mastery of what was announced as 'signal processing' is apparent not just in the speed with which he can react to what a live instrumentalist is playing, but in the way that he can incorporate this into a musical performance, where he doesn't feel disadvantaged in any way: the interaction is real, the music organic, the textures and sounds often strange. Electronics added extra dimensions to the trombone's farty, windy physicality, and drowsy, mysterious slurs: metal, percussive clanging, sounds that are still striking and fresh even though electronics has become almost *de rigeur* in the underground music scene.

This was probably the shortest set of the night: a couple more (acoustic) duos followed. Trombonist **Gail Brand** and tenor saxophonist **Simon Picard's** piece was rather muted and downbeat, homophonic melancholy being the prevailing texture and mood, although this did lead to some slightly more energised abstract speculation. Of course, they were both wearing all-black (which seems to be a kind of uniform for a lot of free improvisers), which tied in with the gloomy feel. Not the most compelling music of the night, it has to be said, although one little incident made it stand out. At one point, a mobile phone went off, but, for a split second, I thought what I heard had been generated by the trombone – a tropical bird, a little glitch, fitting in with the sounds Brand was producing at the time, it was a well-nigh perfect illustration of the way that freely improvised music can interact with those 'distractions' which would be completely disruptive in most other musical contexts – a radical conclusiveness, or, in a parallel which would no doubt have pleased Paul Rutherford, communism in sound.

The second duo was a two-sax affair with an appearance by **Lol Coxhill**, which is always a welcome thing. (His most recent disc is, in fact, a series of duos with various artists, released on Emanem Records). On this occasion, he was paired with **Pete McPhail** on baritone. A bit tougher and grittier than Brand and Picard, the lines dipped and dived and flowed in a more untethered way. Coxhill's soprano was both brazen and swooning in a piece that was full of incident, but never really settled on any one feel or motif for a long period of time. Though McPhail was in black, Coxhill broke the mode with his bright orange shirt, and you might say that his playing reflected something of the exuberance that suggested.



In the final set before the interval, the three trombonists who'd already appeared (Gail Brand, Dave Amis, and Robert Jarvis) came back on stage, joined by another trombonist, Alan Tomlinson, for what was billed as '**Trombone Fiesta.**'

An experiment with acoustics, it saw each member of the quartet place themselves in a different corner of the room, bouncing sounds of the walls and off each other. It felt as if the audience was caught in the middle somewhat, and, considering the loudness with which trombones could play, it was sometimes rather painful for the ears, although it wasn't all bombast: in one supremely unsettling section, dark, dribbling, muted, splattering notes pinged round the room, as if the sound waves were crawling insidiously round the walls. A bit of a performance gimmick, perhaps (they moved into the audience as well), but an interesting number nonetheless.

The first item following the interval was not musical, although very much concerned with music: a presentation of Rutherford's instruments to the Cuba Solidarity Committee. You could question the validity of supporting Castro's regime (just because he's been a thorn in the side of the US for decades shouldn't blind us to his dodgy human rights record) – and I'm sure many people there did – but it was a nice gesture, and a damn sight more useful thing to do than some rock musician festooning his wall with unplayed guitar trophies, which will end up in some museum after his death, the purpose they were made for virtually forgotten. A statement from Paul's family was read out,

which included the sentence: “there are more music in Cuba than there are instruments.” Who knows what the trombones will be used for, but at least they’ll be used.

Following on from this event with vaguely political resonances came some overt agitprop from vocalist **Maggie Nicols** and pianist **Veryan Weston**, the ‘duo politico’, both wearing appropriately red tops (Nicols’ ordering us to “make capitalism history”). The only time that night, apart from Mike Westbrook’s opening blues, that any written material was involved, they delivered a programme of old revolutionary songs. ‘I saw Joe Hin last night’ was taken very straight, evolving into free improvisation with the usual panapholy of shrieks and moans, before seguing into the more jazz/Latin flavoured groove of ‘Dynamite Dream’ (“revolution is natural, it’s not an aberration”), and, finally, that old warhorse ‘L’Internationale’, to provide a rousing conclusion. For an audience dedicated to free improvisation, strange that it was this composed material that got the biggest cheer of the night so far...

If that was overly polemical for some (including me), what followed was a mouth-watering, and purely musically-minded, first-time-ever supergroup of sorts: a quartet of **Evan Parker** on tenor sax, **Kenny Wheeler** (almost 80 now) on trumpet, **Philip Waschmann** on violin, and **Steve Beresford** on piano (pictured above). Despite Wheeler’s slightly frail appearance, the ensemble was dominated by his voice – Beresford kept his inclination towards anarchism in check, and the complementary sounds of tenor and violin gave the whole thing an almost classical edge, in terms of texture at least. Nobody ever settled into anything too comfortable – there were moments when Parker could have easily gone into his circular breathing routine, or Wheeler into ECM-melodicism, but neither did, keeping their contributions pithy and to-the-point, letting themselves be lead by sound rather than trying to lead it themselves.



One more duo to follow, which saw the appearance of **Henry Lowther**, another trumpeter and another versatile musician who’s played with Graham Collier and Gil Evans, as well as much studio session work (including with rock band Hawkwind, at one

point). He was paired with **John Russell**, probably the leading guitarist in free music after Derek Bailey, and the somewhat strange combination of instruments was made to work convincingly. Russell is obviously influenced by Bailey – hard not to be, in this field – but his playing is perhaps less icy, while, in Lowther’s hands, the muted trumpet had a piercing clarity: a hard, bright, slightly pinched sound miles away from the usual melancholy eeriness that mutes tend to produce. Although it did feel rather like soloist and accompanist – Lowther sending out melodic signals over thorny guitar – it was a nice palette-cleanser before the extravagant orchestral textures of the **London Improvisers’ Orchestra**.

There were so many musicians involved in this collective that they couldn’t all fit on the stage, some clustered on the floor around its edges, cramming up every single inch of space available. Obviously, this involved considerable organisation difficulties, so there was a short second interval. When the music came, it was similarly packed and dense – there was no conduction, no score, and, seemingly, no plan, and it was easy to become lost in (whether you view this in a good or a bad sense). Consequently, it’s hard to describe: much of it was a constant wash of sound, different things happening all at once, and individual voices end up getting rather lost. A joyful noise, or angry anarchism? It was hard to tell: the performance approached cacophony, and I think there were times when it crossed the line into that (some of the musicians seemed to sense it too, Steve Beresford sitting for long periods of time at his piano, not touching the keys, aware that nobody could hear anything he was playing). There were also moments, though, when everything ebbed, and Maggie Nicols’ voice entwined with flute, clarinet and violin to create mournful, ambivalent, atmospheric soundscapes. It eventually ended, past the planned finishing time, with Nicols singing “we love you so much” and everything – eventually – fading away.

Ultimately, this was an occasion whose sombre moments didn’t become oppressive, and at all times there was maintained an appropriate degree of respect and sense of sadness at Rutherford’s passing. I’ll leave the last word to Emanem label boss Martin Davidson, who introduced the final set by the LIO. *“Last of all, I’d like to say thank you to Paul Rutherford, for being such an inspiration, but also such a wonderful human being. We miss you, but we remember you, and the memory will stay.”*





Above: London Improvisers' Orchestra.

CHARLES GAYLE UK TOUR, SEPTEMBER 2007



Charles Gayle's story is a remarkable one. After playing 'free music' as early as the 1950s (according to him, he was playing free **before** players like Ornette Coleman caused such a big splash in the late 50s/early 60s). However, he was considered too far out even by free jazz record companies, and fell into decline – though he apparently recorded a trio sessions for ESP in the early 70s, this was at the time when the company was collapsing, due to heavy bootlegging, according to Bernard Stollman, and it was never released. He became homeless and busked for a living – the archetypal image of the artist misunderstood by the public playing on through adversity – a somewhat romanticised image perhaps. Anyway, in the late 80s he was discovered by a Danish record producer and played popular shows at the Knitting Factory. Since then he has recorded over 30 albums.

In recent years his music has started to incorporate more traditional elements: he's covered bop tunes and standards, and, as well as his trademark white plastic alto, begun to play a gruffly lyrical piano (his first instrument) with touches of Monk, especially on ballads, in which he employs sprinkly right hand runs and a punchy left hand. His piano playing is beautiful and completely different in character, and a real revelation – it's akin to the sober, studied style of Andrew Hill, still drenched with emotion, just not the white hot stuff he does on his saxophone. A truly multi-faceted artist. He's antagonised audiences who love his music, but are left-wing and hate his views - because of his rants about abortion and homosexuality, and his adoption of the persona of the Street Clown.

He recently came for a week-long tour of the UK with bassist William Parker and drummer Mark Sanders, and will be appearing with a different trio at the LJF next month. Here are a couple of gig reviews of that UK tour: appearances in Liverpool (Rod Warner's review, originally at 'Words and Music' (<http://soundsandtexts.blogspot.com>)) and London's Red Rose (Scott McMillan's review, which originally appeared at 'Mapsadaisical' (<http://mapsadaisical.wordpress.com/>)).

(1) Charles Gayle/William Parker/Mark Sanders at the Everyman Bistro, Liverpool, September 17th 2007.

The gig venue is beneath the Everyman theatre in Liverpool, part of the Bistro complex of three rooms. Passing through the other two, you come to the performance space – oblong, with table seating. People fill the place up, with quite a few latecomers (what's new there?) but a creditable crowd. Organizers Frakture obviously know how to get the vote out, as it were... They got their money's worth...

The musicians take their places at the end of the room – no stage. No P.A. - which wouldn't be needed in this space anyway, a small amp for the bass the only added electricity. These three will generate plenty of their own over the next two sets... Mark Sanders, almost boyish in comparison to his two cohorts tonight on this tour – Charles Gayle and William Parker, stalwarts of the vibrant New York 'free jazz' scene -and beyond. Both striking figures yet contrasted – Parker, a large bear of a man as befits a bass player, maybe, of his power, smiling, almost avuncular. Gayle, a ramrod thin tall man, with a serious face that has a clouded, mysteriously inward look to it (although I saw him in the interval in conversation and he smiled frequently, displaying a completely different facet to his character).

They start up, Gayle floating lines across a quickly busy backdrop from bass and drums – although this is no sax plus rhythm show – each part of the trio is integral to the sound. Gayle is playing a white plastic alto rather than his usual tenor – an iconic instrument. And you can trace the lineage from Bird – blindingly fast playing - to Ornette – a strong melodic freedom and a way of floating across a busy rhythm before locking back in with a vengeance – via Eric Dolphy (to my ears) in some of the skittering intervallic jumps. Yet Gayle is manifestly his own man, a veteran whose mysterious roots go back to the free jazz days of the sixties – he is older than Parker and the younger Sanders - a superior technique fine-honed down the years that may pay homage where applicable but flows free with his own strong voice. Gayle is renowned for his squalling, screaming intensity yet held back some of this tonight to concentrate on spirals of fast-moving melody – laced with a fair share of vocal inflection and high-register playing yet

these all seemed integrated into his overall style – moving effortlessly and at a dizzying speed between what effect he feels necessary to enhance the proceeding line. Parker takes a bass solo which is muddled a little by the room's acoustic but still displays his warm virtuosity. Sanders takes his moment, a hard-hitting solo, rhythmic density and movement effortlessly slapped out - he more than holds his own in this company throughout. Towards the end of the set Parker hits a walk a couple of times to balance and colour the intensity – because this is high-octane stuff – answered by the others as they move into more conventional swinging patterns. At the end, the place is rapturous – you are aware that you have witnessed something special – yoo hoo! Wild music that hits the head, heart and feet...

Second set. After all that preceding fire, one wonders, can they hold that level throughout? To which the answer is: YES! A similar easy-going start before Gayle hits his declamatory phrases – Parker using arco bass a couple of times to saw out jagged lines at a higher volume, at one point chasing a motif he dropped in and out of throughout across the registers, coming off with an amazing slithering glissando up and down the neck executed with virtuosic control, essaying swooning vocalised figures that seemed to be telling a joke of some kind. Gayle blows wild and free, then drops back to play a frail melody that opens up the space and lets the drums through, emphasizing the equality of this band. The music becomes more pointillistic to contrast with the overall multi-noted density, Gayle fragmenting his line. Deep into the set Parker is swaying at his bass with a joy that comes across vividly. Towards the end they just lift off to stunning levels of wild intoxication – Sanders takes another solo, smacking high harmonics off his cymbals, stick between teeth as he used a hand to hammer his drums – truly music of the body as well as the mind. Coming in to the end you realise that these guys just do not FALTER. Gayle lets rip, fast and hard in a ferocious interlocking dance with bass and drums to produce music that reaches deep down into my soul and rips it AWAKE.

AWESOME...

"...it is the role of the artist to incite political, social, and spiritual revolution, to awaken us from our sleep and never let us forget our obligations as human beings, to light the fire of human compassion. Sounds that enlighten are infinite. We can put no limit to joy, or on our capacity for love."

(William Parker and Patricia Nicholson Parker, 'Blueprint for a Cultural Revolution')

Finally: thanks to Frakture (<http://frakture.org>) for providing such a great gig – I know only too well what a hassle and sometimes thankless task organising these occasions can be. Applause all round... And I had a great time in Liverpool – looking forward to the next visit...

(2) Charles Gayle, William Parker and Mark Sanders, The Red Rose, 21/09/07

Review by Scott McMillan

Ashley Wales' Back In Your Town night continues to provide us with some of the most exciting improvisation to be found anywhere in clubland. And I mean clubland; the Red Rose, situated on a most unappealing stretch of the Seven Sisters Road to the South West of Finsbury Park has the charm of a decades-old working men's club. But look

between the multiple TVs tuned to Sky Sports and the chalkboards showing such endearingly precise prices as “Bitter £2.12”, and you will see the walls are festooned with pictures of performers - the room through the back is what you are looking for if you need a bit of free jazz or live comedy to lift your spirits in this part of North London.

[Note – more’s the pity that it’s now being converted into a pool hall, thus leaving regular improv events without a venue and potentially proving a major blow to the availability of improvised music in the capital].



Photos © Andy Newcombe

As a prelude to the main act, Steve Beresford and Neil Metcalfe performed an excellent piano/flute duet. The level of listening and the speed of the reactions to each other was extraordinary - whether Beresford would stumble upon a phrase, or Metcalfe chanced upon a melody, the other would take it, bash it around for a bit, and hand it back for further work. It was probably inevitable given their respective choice of instruments that Beresford would excite most, leaping as he did from the thunderous rumble on the left to the flashes of lightning on the right, nearly falling off his stool as he did so.



Mark Sanders had barely managed to finish his thanks to those involved with the organisation of this tour when the impatient and cross-looking Gayle burst in with his white alto, leaving Sanders and William Parker tearing after him in chase. Immediately, intensity levels were extremely high; at times all three musicians had their eyes closed in concentration, as they tried to align their respective cog with the revolutions of this great engine.



Parker was the first to be given a solo, a long (picture the impatient Gayle glowering stage right), fast (I had to check that he in fact has only five fingers on each hand) thing which seemed to be constantly fighting against an urge to develop some funk. He took a glorious - and much shorter - arco solo later, deft as they come, and bursting with melody. These were moments to savour - during the ensemble pieces the muscular Parker's work became at times surprisingly buried amidst the hullabaloo being created around him.

Sanders's moments in the spotlight were disappointingly brief: as I write, I'm listening to his solo record *Swallow Chase* on Wales' Treader label, and he is clearly capable of creating sublime extended percussion pieces. By some distance the youngest man on stage, he played a mostly subservient role, but played it with the utmost quality and consistency - marvellously responsive, switching between the sticks, brushes, and mallets, and using every square centimetre of every surface available to him to produce the fullest array of sounds, but in the most unshowy fashion. Towards the end of a piece which had kicked off as an Ayler-esque march, Gayle and Parker lured him into a drums versus sax and bass showdown; Sanders fought his corner with aplomb, matching their knotty phrases with his own intricate shapes.

Gayle's sax playing was, as you would have expected, incendiary throughout the evening, featuring coruscating Coltrane-like runs into upper registers, all played with a huge, chewy vibrato. However the quality of his piano playing was an unexpected surprise to me - he would feel his way in before playing with Bley-ish style, humming and singing as he went. When, at the start of the second piano trio piece, Parker and Sanders led off at brisk pace, a grin broke out for the first time on Gayle's face, appreciating the challenge he was being set, and responding with relish. This image was in contrast to the stern, forceful leader we had seen throughout the evening, calling players in, before shutting them out with a blast from his horn. After the evening faded out with Gayle playing a snatch of Tyner on piano ("Naima", if I remember correctly, which would be a first), this stony facade was finally shattered by his humble and heartfelt thankyou speech. As he signed off with "There may be three of us, but we're a quartet - you are the fourth person", suddenly he was once more just a thin, gaunt looking old man, and the fourth person showed their appreciation with a huge and massively deserved ovation.



**JOSHUA REDMAN TRIO AT THE ANVIL, BASINGSTOKE
(November 2007) Review by Ian Thumwood**

Back in November, I made the trip up the M3 to catch Joshua Redman's trio, as part of their UK tour. If you have the chance to catch them live, I would thoroughly recommend this group, albeit the substitution of Gregory Hutcherson on drums for Antonio Sanchez from the group that played Vienne in July gave this band a totally different feel.

Back in the summer, the repertoire and approach seemed to tip the hat towards Sonny Rollins even if the sax trio has now undergone something of a radical rethink since those halcyon days of the late 1950's. Time to move on, I think.

Last night I was fortunate to sit a few rows back from the stage and became totally wrapped up in this group's music. Whilst I must admit not to have been a fan of Redman Jr's playing on the two previous occasions that I had heard him live with an early trio and Kurt Rosenwinkel's band (gave the Elastic Trio a miss), this concert has really made me re-think his music. As a friend said after the encore, the interplay resembled that of Lucky Thomspon's trio with Pettitford and Betts. Indeed, Redman's tone has something of the furry quality of Thompson's and the concentration on spinning convoluted and jivey improvised lines between the tenor and bass added to this sense. The interplay between the three players was amazing, the bass work of Rueben Rogers nothing less than staggering whether providing a pulse for the drummer and Redman to exchange lines around or under-pinning the saxophonist's solos with intelligently considered intervals.



In one composition, they imaginatively used silence between the dialogue between the bass / horn and the drums so that the couple of beats with pauses actually swung. I thoroughly enjoyed watching the communication between the three players.

Most of the material was original although there was a frisky version of "Surrey with the fringe on top" to open up the session and a work out on "East of the sun" that ended up with Redman playing so far beyond the structure of the tune that the reprise of the melody came almost as a shock. You had to ask yourself just how did he managed to get there.

Incidentally, although Redman is less convincing on soprano, the one piece that featured this horn included a chorus of multi-phonics and circular-breathing that was demonstrative to these ears of how the American has clearly checked out the likes of Evan Parker. Odd to think that jazz has now moved on so far that a "Mainstream" player can now comfortably incorporate devices into his playing such as this.

By and large, this concert eschewed gallery-pleasing crescendos and the tone of the music was generally relaxed and considered - not unlike the approach of Wayne Shorter's current group. When the music did build up to a climax, it came across as entirely spontaneous.

As I said previously, the jury was definitely out with regard to Joshua Redman up until I heard the two versions of his trio this year but this current group is right on the money. Bassist Rueben Rogers has also proved himself to be a wonderfully responsive and "listening" bassist.

This is a great band and anyone who likes there jazz to be thoughtfully considered as opposed to representing the rush of blood to the head will find much to admire live.

Photo by Greg Stewart (<http://stewsdays.blogspot.com/>)



Above: saxophonist Virginia Genta of the Jooklo Duo.

**SONNY SIMMONS WITH TIGHT MEAT AT THE PORTLAND ARMS,
CAMBRIDGE, 21st November 2007. Review by David Grundy**

This was a rare occasion indeed: a visit to the UK by the great Sonny Simmons, someone who's played with all the greats (Rollins, Mingus, Dolphy, even Jimi Hendrix) and who, like Charles Gayle, had to survive a period of homelessness before making his comeback in the 1990s. Adept on the English horn as well as the alto sax, the context in which he was appearing this time was definitely not the sort that would let him demonstrate his prowess on that instrument. He was paired with 'Tight Meat,' who usually perform as a duo, consisting of two Scots: saxophonist David Keenan (also a journalist and author who writes for 'The Wire' magazine) and drummer Alex Neilson. For these dates, bassist George Lyle was added.

A somewhat unusual tour, given that Simmons has several times expressed his dislike of free players who don't vary their playing. He never mentions anyone specific, but, given his performance on the night and on record, I would have thought that David Keenan would be the sort of person he had in mind. He seemed to have one mode: very loud and very dissonant. You know the sort of thing: if you're into free jazz, you've probably heard it many times before. Meanwhile, Simmons can certainly go 'out there', but he always prefers to come back to a melody – a jazz standard, a song from a show, a Thelonious Monk tune. Keenan was having none of it, as I'll go on to explain...

I caught them in the back room of a pub in Cambridge, with an audience of, at a maximum, 40 people, which says some sorry things about how this country values creative improvised music. What with the London Musicians' Collective losing its arts council funding and the Red Rose shutting down, it's not a wonder that someone like Paul Rutherford became very bitter and depressed at times.

But I digress – returning to the matter at hand, here are my impressions of this particular concert. The first group were the Jooklo Duo (who I'd never heard of); (female) tenor saxophonist Virginia Genta and drummer David Vanzan, playing fairly typical post-Coltrane free jazz. Genta's tenor tone was gruff, occasionally displaying some more rough-hewn lyrical touches, but there was never really any sense of development to what she played: she would introduce one idea, then, rather than taking that idea on and developing into something further (as Coltrane did), raise the horn in the air and give a generic screech. A bit frustrating - like going round in circles, or banging your head against a wall - not making a breakthrough into complete freedom, and thus feeling a bit restricted. The drummer was good though, really locking in with some rhythmically propulsive playing that at one point coalesced with the saxophonist for an impressive minute or so, before they seemed to drift apart. Perhaps not really on the same wavelength? The group's been going since 2004, but apparently Genta's only been playing tenor sax for two years (she started out on alto). Hard to judge, though, as they only played a short set. Perhaps they will develop further and their playing will start to coalesce more.

The second group, and the one everyone had been waiting for: Tight Meat with Sonny Simmons. As was to be expected, it was not subtle at all: high-volume, high energy, collective improvisation, of the 'Ascension' kind. There was almost no let-up, although there was some wonderful moments where the band collectively paused for a micro-second, then launched in again, giving the re-entry a volcanic force, giving the briefest of breathing spaces: an effect that's quite hard to describe, but very effective in the moment.

As a live experience it had an exhilarating quality, forcing you to participate in its pulsations, to pulsate along with the vibrations in the floor, created by all the noise coming from the stage. At its best (and this is what I like about free jazz), it seemed as though all the players had merged into one huge instrument, producing a wall of sound – sorry to have to use the cliché, but it's the best way I can think of describing it! You can listen to individual players if you choose (inevitably, I focussed on Simmons the most), but what you really concentrate on is the collective whole. This type of collective improvisation works on two levels in that way, and is, I suppose, somewhat similar to what many people value in free improv: the meshing and merging of personalities and sonorities into one, though the meshing here is obviously of a very different kind.

Below: Sonny Simmons with Tight Meat



The old criticisms about ‘angry’ music would certainly apply here, if you were disposed make them. In fact, judging by their demeanour while performing, I think that Keenan and Neilson probably believe them themselves – except they see it as a virtue rather than a vice, as a punk-like tool of rebellion and social protest. Still, while these are obviously important parts of the free jazz aesthetic, it’s ultimately more complex than that, as Simmons demonstrates time and time again. The music offers a mixture of extreme emotions – it’s sound stretched out on the edge, existing on the edge, daring to look out over the precipice and perhaps deciding to jump, or maybe to fall back and subside.

That’s the positive: in the above paragraph, I also hinted at some of the drawbacks I felt while listening. Though Simmons was playing more melodically, lyrically at times, his fellow saxophonist, David Keenan, didn’t seem to notice: he simply squealed and wailed away all night. I thought that the (more experienced) bassist was responding to Simmons fairly subtly, trying to collaborate with him in introducing a drop in tempo, in energy, a change of mood – but Keenan wouldn’t let this happen, and neither would drummer Neilson, who played at the same loud, fast level all night. While the sound of the two saxophones going at it full pelt was admittedly a fine sound, variety is the spice of life, and there were times when you wished the other musicians would just sense what Simmons was doing and go with him. I’m on dangerous ground here, and I realise that I probably shouldn’t impute motive in the following manner, but I feel that it could almost be interpreted as lack of respect – when you get the chance to play with someone who has the accumulated experience and wisdom of Sonny Simmons, you don’t force him to go in your direction, you go with him in is. Still, the man seemed to be enjoying himself, joking with the audience at the end of the set, and, while Keenan and Neilson (who’d

ripped his shirt off midway through) looked exhausted, utterly spent, he still seemed sprightly, as if he could go on like that for another few hours at least. I'm not sure he'd even broken a sweat.

So, all in all: I'm not sure that this is a collaboration with that much mileage in it - not sure it would even generate an album, though I suppose it could. It did raise doubts in my minds about a younger generation of musicians taking aspects of the 60s free jazz and simplifying them, which I don't think is doing very much for the music. But still, even simplified free jazz does things which no other genre can: it's not the only way, and more subtle musics are also needed, but it can give you a real rush that much jazz struggles to provide. I'd rather hear this than some bland, innocuous mainstream act any day.



Above: David Keenan on saxophone.

CLOSING WORDS

It's been rewarding compiling this first magazine, if a lot of work; reading, contacting, listening. Hence I would be very grateful if I could get some more contributors, otherwise this will become something of a one-man show. As you can probably tell from the preceding pages, I don't have a problem with expressing my opinions, and at length, but I know there are plenty of people out there with more informed ones than mine. So this is essentially a plea for help...

I can't offer payment, at least at the moment, as it's going to be pretty difficult keeping this beast afloat, so the more people I can get writing the better. This magazine can hopefully only improve in quality, and with your help I know it can definitely do so.

If there is anything in particular you want to send - gig or CD reviews, features, interviews, and anything else you can think of, really - please get in touch via email or via letter to the addresses provided at the end of the opening editorial. Additionally, I can delegate tasks...if you'd like to be put on some sort of bank of writers who I'll ask to do stuff, then please let me know. If you're a musician, I'd love to hear your work: feel free to send CDs for review, to the address provided at the bottom of the editorial.

Anyway, that's it for now, hope you enjoyed the first issue, and hope you have an excellent 2008....

List of Contributors

Michael Ardaiole's music criticism can be viewed at the 'Audiversity' blog.

Marcello Cellan- Marcello's excellent music criticism can be viewed at his 'The Blue in the Air' and 'Church of Me' blogs.

Centrifuge helped to run the now-defunct 'Church Number Nine' blog, and now runs 'If You Know What I'm Saying', a blog devoted to his writing on the music of Anthony Braxton (<http://ifyouknowwhatimsaying.blogspot.com>).

Andrew Forbes – Andrew runs a blog entitled 'This is Our Music.'

Stef Gijssels runs the excellent 'Stef's Free Jazz reviews' blog (<http://stef-freejazz.blogspot.com>), from which his contributions here are taken.

David Grundy studies English at the University of Cambridge.

Dan Huppertz, originally from Melbourne, Australia, spent some time teaching at an art college in New York: hence his familiarity with the city's 'Downtown' scene.

Noa Corcoran-Tadd studies Archeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, and co-presents, with David Grundy, a jazz show on Cambridge Student Radio (CUR1350).

Henry Kuntz is an improvising saxophonist, who has issued a number of CDs, and who ran the journal 'Bells' in the 1970s, which focussed on free jazz in America at the time. A wonderful resource, this has now been available online at the m-etropolis blog.

Will Layman writes on jazz for the online cultural criticism magazine 'Pop Matters.'

Andy Martin has written essays for a number of publications; he was editor of the magazine 'SMILE' for 26 issues. Along with Dave Fanning he has been a member of the groups Apostle 23 and, most recently, Unit. This latter group gave a performance at the 2007 Freedom of the City festival which sparked the article included here.

Daniel Melnick's writing can be viewed at the 'Soundslope' blog.

Massimo Ricci runs the excellent online review page 'Touching Extremes.'

Ian Thumwood is an amateur pianist with an extensive knowledge of the history and practise of jazz. His other enthusiasts include football and birdwatching.

Rod Warner is a musician, and runs the 'Words and Music' blog

(<http://soundsandtexts.blogspot.com>).

Seth Watter presents a radio show and runs a blog, both entitled 'Meshes of the Afternoon.'

Anthony Whiteford, a saxophonist, has been involved in improvised music in the Bristol area for a number of years.

Thanks also to: Mike and Kate Westbrook, Joan Morrell, Steve Beresford, Vervan Weston, Trevor Watts, Phil Hargreaves, Andy Newcombe, John Rogers, Klaus Theimann, Matthew Brown, Doug Schulkind, and King Kennytone!

